THE TRAGEDY

OF THE

ASSYRIANS

BY

LT. COL. R. S. STAFFORD
D.S.O., M. C.

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TO MY WIFE

WHO REMAINED IN MOSUL, DURING AUGUST 1933

"HISTORY, WHICH IS INDEED LITTLE MORE THAN THE REGISTER OF THE CRIMES, FOLLIES, AND MISFORTUNES OF MANKIND." GIBBON, DECLINE AND FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE, CHAPTER II

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CONTENTS

CONTENTS 3
CHAPTER I: EARLY HISTORY 6
CHAPTER II: THE GREAT WAR 18
CHAPTER III: REFUGEES 27
CHAPTER IV: THE SETTLEMENTS IN IRAQ 34
CHAPTER V: THE ASSYRIAN LEVIES 50
CHAPTER VI: THE ASSYRIANS AND THE LEAGUE 59
CHAPTER VII: THE MAR SHIMUN 82
CHAPTER VIII: THE END OF THE MANDATE 93
CHAPTER IX: THE AFFAIR OF YACU 110
CHAPTER X: THE SYRIAN ADVENTURE 122
CHAPTER XI: THE AUGUST MASSACRES 133
CHAPTER XII: THE LOOTING OF THE VILLAGES 151
CHAPTER XIII: THE REACTION IN THE TOWNS 160
CHAPTER XIV: THE FUTURE OF THE ASSYRIANS 174

The Tragedy of the Assyrians

PREFACE

In August and September 1933 reports of events which had been taking place in northern Iraq occupied some space in the columns of the daily press, not only of Great Britain, but of Europe. For some years previously comparatively little attention had been paid by the British press to the affairs of Iraq. The termination of the British mandate in October 1932 and the consequent complete independence of Iraq had been welcomed in England with much satisfaction; indeed, practically the whole British press had long advocated the curtailment of British responsibilities and expenditure in that country. Sincere good wishes for the success of the new Iraqi state were universally expressed. In the summer of 1933, King Feisal, to whom more than to anyone else Iraq owed the fulfillment of her national aspirations, paid a state visit to England, where his charm of manner and attractive personality made a deep impression on all who met him. As a result of this visit hopes for the continuance of close and friendly relations between the two countries were strengthened

Up to the summer of 1933 comparatively few people in England were aware of the existence of the Assyrians in Iraq. Ecclesiastical circles had, indeed, been interested in this Christian remnant, and there were others who had expressed concern regarding this minority in the north of Moslem Iraq. The reports of the massacres of Christians by Moslems came as a shock to everyone, and not least to those who had at heart the future of Iraq. These reports alleged that large numbers of Assyrians had been murdered. None of the accounts given were accurate, either as to the details of the massacres or as to the causes which had brought them about. In Iraq a veil of secrecy was successfully imposed, and the news that trickled through became more and more scanty, and more and more inaccurate. On September 5, 1933, King Feisal died very suddenly in Switzerland, and this sad event, though it once more brought Iraq temporarily into the news, rather helped to submerge the Assyrian question. Since then, so many more important events have occurred throughout the world that very occasional references to it have appeared in the press, and the question has been forgotten by all but the small section of people who are really interested.

Even these people, however, are by no means fully informed of what actually

happened. The inevitable result, in the absence of any authoritative statement, has been the circulation - often by means of pamphlets - of all manner of garbled accounts. These accounts have been equally unfair to Great Britain, to Iraq, and to the Assyrians. It appears only right that a true account should be given of what really happened, and why it happened. This is the object of this book. A no less important object is to show that the future of the Assyrians is still unsettled. Something must be done for this unfortunate people. They have suffered much, and if some of their sufferings have been the result of their own folly, allowance should be made for the circumstances in which they found themselves. People who feel they are unwanted are not likely to make easy or pleasant guests.

My duties as Administrative Inspector in Iraq, where I had been for six years, brought me to Mosul in May 1933. I was thus in the closest touch with the Assyrian situation as it developed that summer, and I was in a unique position to know what really took place. I have endeavoured to write as impartial an account as possible. If I have been compelled on occasions to criticize the conduct of the Assyrians, I hope that it will be realized that I am far from lacking in sympathy towards them. If I have written strongly of the behaviour of a section of the Iraqi army, let it not be thought that I have done so in any spirit of ill will towards Iraq. On the contrary, than myself there is no more sincere well-wisher of that country, and this, I venture to hope, will be understood by my many Iraqi friends.

The Tragedy of the Assyrians

CHAPTER I: EARLY HISTORY

Just north-east of the present-day boundary of Iraq and within the borders of Turkey, there is situated a tangled mass of mountains, generally known as Hakkiari. These mountains resemble those of Switzerland, but the country is on an even grander scale. The valleys are narrower; many of them, indeed, are precipitous gorges falling thousands of feet from the high mountains above and bearing little vegetation except a strip of green along the torrent at the base. The mountains rise to 12,000 and even to 14,000 feet. In the summer snow lies on the highest peaks and in winter even in the lowest valleys the snow is deep. The scenery is magnificent, particularly where the Greater Zab River bursts its way through the mountain mass in a series of deep and narrow gorges with falls and rapids as the river drops. Great forests of oak, juniper and, more rarely, pine and maple cover the mountain-sides. In the valleys there is a profusion of rhododendrons, arbutus, hawthorn, and other small trees and shrubs. During the short spring, which follows the melting of the snows, the ground is carpeted with every kind of Alpine flower. The fauna is of the usual Caucasian type - wolves, bears, hyenas, ibex, martens, and foxes. The bird life ranges from tiny pipits and larks to the eagles and vultures that inhabit the higher crags. Chikor abound to attract the sportsman, and there is excellent fishing to be had. This land, where only a virile people could hope to survive, has seldom been visited by Europeans and not at all since the outbreak of the Great War. It is now practically empty, but before the war, tribes of mountaineers could find a scant living by sowing crops on the terraced valleys and by pasturing their hardy sheep and goats on the mountain sides.

Roads, of course, there were none, and the rough tracks which connected one valley with the next were impassable even for mules for several months in the year.

Such a country could afford only a meagre livelihood to the tribes who lived there. These tribes before the war were largely composed of Assyrians, and with them this narrative will be mainly concerned.

They had as neighbours Kurdish tribes as savage and as uncivilized as themselves, while to the north in the direction of the Van, the Armenian settlements began, people who, if less warlike were perhaps a little more versed in the arts of

business and agriculture. To the East runs the Persian-Turkish frontier, a series of high and desolate peaks culminating in Mount Ararat, some seventy miles to the north. To the west, also in broken mountainous country, lived Kurdish tribes which, indeed, were to be found intermingled with the Assyrians, even in Hakkiari. These Kurds (The Kurds, like the Persians, are Aryans though, unlike them, belong to the Sunni and not to the Shia sect. The Assyrians, like the Arabs, are of Semitic descent.) though by race and religion the opposite of the Assyrians, were in other respects not unlike them.

Besides the Assyrian mountaineers, who were Turkish subjects, other Assyrians lived in the plains to the west of Lake Urmiyah. They too suffered in the war vicissitudes of the Assyrian people, but their position, as will be related in due course, is not that of the mountaineers. Other Assyrian elements lived in the lower country south of Hakkiari, within the frontier of what is now Iraq. These people were subject to Kurdish Aghas and were not independent like their kinsmen farther north, but during the war they suffered little less, and today their fortunes are closely linked to those of the mountaineers.

The backbone of the Assyrians, the survivors of a once great people and of a once great Christian Church, were the Hakkiari mountaineers, the tribesmen of the Tiyari, the Jilu, the Tokhuma, and the Baz clans. Living as they did in a hard and unfertile land, they were very poor. What cultivation existed was mainly in artificial terraces on the slopes of the mountains. It could bring but little in, though the Assyrians were a hardworking people, far surpassing the Kurds in this respect, although, as already stated, hardly the equal of the Armenians, their co-religionists.

Their main wealth lay in their flocks and they were as much shepherds as cultivators. They led their flocks up and down the mountain pastures as the seasons changed, often living during the summer at a altitude of 8,000 feet, while in the winter their sheep lived with them in their houses, for then even in the valleys the cold was so intense that for days at a time neither animal nor human being could venture out of doors.

The villages were small and generally were built on knolls in the narrow valleys. The houses were built of stone with a flat floor. They possessed few comforts, for the

Assyrians were very poor. Despite their remarkable thrift there was little opportunity of acquiring wealth. Some of them used to go down to Mosul for periods of work, in particular the Baz tribesmen, who are excellent artisans. Others even visited Europe and America, though these were mainly engaged in less creditable begging tours. The remainder, until the arrival of the Mission which the Archbishop of Canterbury sent out in 1886, were almost entirely cut off from outside influences.

Like most mountaineers, the Assyrians were quarrelsome, hot-headed - not to say truculent - and before the war they were independent by nature. It was only after their long experiences as refugees, as we shall see, their character in this last respect altered. Though educationally deficient, as can only be expected living in such a backwater, they were remarkably quick to pick up new ideas. Before the war they had little political conscience as such. Their chief idea was to live undisturbed by Government officials and by their Kurdish neighbours. In brief, they and the Kurds were living much as were the Highlanders of Scotland before the Forty-Five. They acknowledged the Mar Shimun (See Chapter VII) as their paramount chief and their ecclesiastical head. They were in fact, ruled by their tribal councils, each tribe being led by a Malik and each section by a Rais. These titles were hereditary in the case of some tribes, in the case of others these leaders were popularly elected. In theory, at any rate, the title-holder had to be approved by the Mar Shimun

Their spoken language was Syriac, directly derived from the Aramatic, the language which Christ spoke and which is still used in their church services. Their churches were small and like the houses, built of stone, containing a kind of Holy-Of-Holies, a small and dark room. Men and women worshipped together, though the two sexes stood in different parts of the church. Sermons were seldom given, and even commentaries on the Scriptures were rare.

Before the war the clothes of the Assyrians were extremely picturesque. Their outer garments, consisting of baggy trousers and a short coat, were of locally woven stuff of many bright colours. In this they resembled the Kurds, except that they wore a small conical cap instead of a turban (this conical cap, be it noted, is seen on some of the ancient Assyrian tablets). This costume is still worn by many of the villagers in the

mountains, but most of them who have been in the towns have now adopted European dress.

The skin and complexion of the Assyrians resemble those of the Southern Italian and in many cases are much lighter. The men, though not tall, are generally of good physique, the weaklings having died during infancy. Fair hair and blue eyes are often seen. The women, as a rule, are darker than the men and are seldom good-looking. They possess great fortitude and remarkable powers of recovery. The life which they led before the war, and the hardships which they have undergone since, are not likely to have made them soft. The women also wielded considerable influence. Surma Khanum, the aunt of the Mar Shimun, of whom much will be written later, is certainly the most dominant personality among the Assyrians at the present time. The standard of morality among the Assyrians has always been particularly high.

Such in brief was the life and situation of the Assyrians at the outbreak of the war. (For a full description of the life of the Assyrians before the war, Canon Wigram's "The Cradle Of Mankind" and "The Assyrians and their Neighbours" should be consulted). Politically, their anxieties were pressing, but economically and socially their manner of living had altered but little during the last five centuries. The Assyrians are convinced that they are the descendants of the rightful heirs of the ancient Assyrian Empire, which with its capital at Nineveh (Nineveh is situated on the left bank of the Tigris, just opposite Mosul, and traces of its vast walls can still be seen) flourished during the second millennium B. C., until 600 B. C. and which is familiar to schoolboys, at any rate of an earlier generation, from Byron's famous verse of Sennacherib.

The Assyrians of that empire were a Semitic people who had migrated from the south of Mesopotamia after the fall of Ur about 2000 B. C. They were the founders of the first military empire in history, and their power was felt all over the Middle and Near East. They spread their conquests far afield, but the heart of their country was the Tigris Plain between Nineveh and Assur, the modern Shergat. This great empire fell in 606 B. C., when the Medes and the Persians swept westwards and blotted out all traces of the great capital, destroying it so utterly that when Xenophon and his Ten Thousand passed that way less than three hundred years later, they did not even know that they had passed one of the most famous sites of antiquity.

The Tragedy of the Assyrians

But though the Assyrian Empire was thus destroyed, there is no reason to think that the Assyrian people disappeared. Rulers and princes would, of course, be killed or taken into captivity, and the fighting men would be slaughtered in large numbers, but the women and the young children would survive, and even with the admixture of races that normally follows a successful invasion, the Assyrian stock must have remained very largely unchanged, in the way that the common people do remain through conquest after conquest. They were indeed to become accustomed to a series of conquests and invasions as their part of the world has been one of the great cockpits of history. The Greeks swept eastwards under Alexander, driving out the Medes and the Persians. When the Hellenic grip relaxed after Alexander's death, the Parthians and the Persians in succession surged westwards, but still the common people would have maintained their stock fairly pure and probably invigorated rather than otherwise by such admixtures as had taken place.

With the development of Roman political power in the last century B. C., continual wars were fought between the East and West, the boundary line moving backwards and forwards according to the varied fortunes of the wars; wars which in the end so exhausted both sides that they fell an easy prey to the fresh forces of Islam. The clash between the Roman and the Orient was much more fundamental than the conquests of Eastern peoples which had preceded it - the Hellenic influence brought by Alexander and his generals was too fleeting to count - for it was a clash of ideas and civilizations as well as a clash of arms, but throughout all these wars the tillers of the soil remained unchanged. They suffered, of course, and at times were even actively oppressed, but there was no persecution such as would destroy them or even alter their characteristics. In many cases the conquerors were bound to make use of their conquered enemies, who often rose to high, though not dominant, positions in the State. All this time, too, it should be remembered the country of the Two Rivers remained one of the richest lands in the world. It was indeed a garden from Samarra, fifty miles north of Baghdad, to the Persian Gulf, though the tradition that a squirrel could then journey from Samarra to the ocean without ever having to come to the ground must have been more fanciful than accurate. A remarkable irrigation system had gradually been

evolved, the trace of which can even now be seen in the arid and treeless plains of Iraq. The fighting races which one after the other conquered the country were content to leave the peasantry alone. From them they took tribute, and from them they obtained their supplies of food.

And so it was following the advent of Islam. The Arabs did not, any more than their predecessors, destroy the people of the country. They granted to those who did not accept Islam a protected though inferior status, and it is clear that from the fall of Nineveh, six centuries before Christ, to the time of the coming of the Mongols and the Tartars, eighteen centuries later, the people of Northern Iraq must have changed but little. (The seventh and eighth centuries were the peak of Christian missionary activity still farther east in Central Asia and China, and the impulse came from the Church of the East of which the Patriarch had his residence in Baghdad). Students of genetics will realize the prepotent force which would have partly caused and partly been the effect of this long breeding of generations true to type. The essential elements of the ancient stock unquestionably survived. It is true that by A.D. 1400, the population was not one-tenth of what it had been four hundred years earlier. This applied with greater truth to the more southerly portion of the country, which was laid waste by Hulagu Khan, who sacked Baghdad in 1256 and put the whole population to the sword. One hundred years later, however, the arch destroyer, Timur the Lame, swept his tide of destruction across the Mosul Plain, which was the scene of one of the greatest massacres of his bloody record. With his death, in A.D. 1404, the Mongol tide receded.

By this time the majority of the Assyrian survivors had fled from the plains to the high mountains of Hakkiari, and though in due course many of them did return, it was this district which then became the real homeland of the Assyrian people. (There is no historical foundation for the Assyrian tradition that after the fall of Nineveh many of the Assyrian princes and leaders escaped to the mountains and that it is from them that the Assyrians of today are directly descended).

When the next conquerors, the Ottoman Turks, came in, they found among the survivors in the Mosul plain an extraordinary admixture of races. In few parts of the world were there more different types. The pure Arab, the pure Kurd, the Yezidi, the Jew, the Persian, the Parthian, the Mongol, as well as the ancient Assyrian type, were

to be found, with admixtures of all. They exist to the present day, with the complication of numerous Christian sects. In Mosul, there are Nestorians, Jacobites, Chaldeans, Roman Catholics, with a few Protestants. To them must be added the Moslems, the great majority, a few Sabaeans, the Devil-worshipping Yezidis of obscure origin, and the still more obscure Shebeks.

It has been pointed out that the ancient Assyrian type as depicted in the tablets found at Nineveh and elsewhere is clearly retained in the modern Assyrian. Dr. Wigram in his book, "The Assyrians and Their Neighbours", gives a photographic example. This argument, however, is rather weak. The modern and the ancient Assyrians were both of Semitic blood. Many a Jew or Arab, who are also of Semitic descent, or even a Yezidi who probably is not, if he did his hair in the same way as the priest in the modern photograph would as closely resemble the Assyrian of the ancient tablets. Again, many Assyrians, and particularly those of the Tokhuma tribe, have distinct Mongolian features. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that the Assyrians retain something of the old Assyrian strain. It is, naturally, much diluted, but it is there. What is still more certain is that what remained of this strain has changed but little during the last five hundred years. For during this last period there has been little or no intermarriage between the Assyrians and their neighbours.

So much for the Assyrian claim that they are the lineal descendants of the ancient empire of Nineveh. It is of great ethnological interest, but is largely academic when compared with the claims they have put forward, that their Church is the survival of the ancient Eastern Church - this aspect of Assyrian history is of great importance in view of the fact that in the Middle East religion and nationality are to all intents and purposes synonymous. (A few years ago some Turks of undoubted Turkish blood were sent to Greece in the course of the inter-transfer of Turks and Greeks, simply because they were Christians). When the political power of Rome fell to pieces before the onslaughts of the Barbarians from Central Europe, and Christianity, that new religion, began to take its place as one of the great factors in the development of European civilization, the church in the East began to exert those political influences which have had their actions and repercussions down to our own time.

The Tragedy of the Assyrians

The spread of Christianity in the East was far more rapid than it was in the West. (According to tradition, more or less well founded, Christianity was introduced into Mesopotamia in the first century A.D. by St. Ada I [Thaddaeus of the New Testament] and his disciple St. Mara I. St. Thomas had already passed farther east into India. There was a flourishing Christian community in Babylon as early as A.D. 80, and it appears that Christianity spread even more rapidly father north, round what is now Mosul. The Partians, who were at this time rulers of the country, were probably not averse to seeing a healthy rival to the religion of their Persian enemies). Nor is this surprising. Christianity was an Eastern religion. Its first missionaries were Eastern. As everywhere else, Christianity took hold first among the humbler people. In the West, Rome was still persecuting the Christians, and as Rome was at war with Persia, it seemed politic to the Persian rulers to tolerate their Christian subjects. These wars of East against West, too, prevented much intercourse between the established Church of the East and the growing Church of the West. For though the See of Antioch was nominally under Antioch, it was even from the earlier days almost independent. Thus the fury of the dispute over the Aryan heresy hardly touched the Church of the East. On the other hand, the Church of the East accepted the doctrines of Nestorius. (Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople, was condemned in A.D. 431 at the Oecunomical Council of Ephesus, the third great Council of the Church. He had quarrelled with Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria. Much of the argument was obscured by terms, and indeed Nestorius himself found it difficult to describe the dual personality of Christ. But he preached that Mary was not the Mother of God, but that she was the Mother of Christ; that the Second Person of the Trinity was not born of the Virgin; that Christ died on the cross as a man, and that His Deity did not suffer thereon. The Assyrians still follow this belief, and are sometimes known as Nestorians). And in so doing, opened the first breach with the Western church.

The position changed, however, in the fourth century when the Emperor Constantine formally adopted Christianity. One of his first actions was to proclaim his protection over all Eastern Christians - protection which in fact he was not able to afford. This harmed his protégés, as have done many well-intentioned interventions of later dated. Meanwhile the theological dialectics of the church fathers were working out to

their inevitable end - the breach with the church in the West, and the splitting of the church in the East (the next Council, that of Calchedon A.D. 451, resulted in a further split and the establishment of the Monophysite Churches of Syria [the Jacobites], of Egypt [the Copts], and of Armenia. It did not, however, touch the Assyrians).

But while these doctrinal disputes were important, equally important was the growing revolt of the Eastern Church against the domination of Constantinople. It was the oldest form of the conflict between the mysticism of the East, the source of all religions, and the intellectuality of the West, as represented by Greece; Semitic Thought as against Greek Philosophy. Then the Moslem hordes spread northwards, carrying out the designs of the Prophet. The Christians, who were the only educated people, were of some use to the Arab conquerors, whose habits they found were more humane than their later conquerors, the Mongols. (The religion of the Mongols when they first appeared in Mesopotamia in the thirteenth century, appears to have been a kind of primitive Paganism, or kind worship. At first the Mongols persecuted the Moslems far more severely than the more humble and harmless Christians. Indeed, for a time there existed more than a slight chance of their adopting Christianity, and there was an interchange of correspondence and missions between them and the Christian Powers of Europe. Nothing came of this, however, and finally their rulers adopted Islam during the fourteenth century. Timur was a fanatical Moslem, and his persecutions and massacres were particularly directed against the Mosul district where Christianity had survived to a much greater extent than around Baghdad. The Christian survivors fled to the mountains, where, even previous to this, there probably were some Christian elements).

History is silent about the Assyrians during the period 1400 to 1550. As already described, numbers of them gradually returned to the plains and became rayahs (protected subjects) of the new conquerors, but as quarrelsomeness and the spirit of schism are always the bane of the Oriental Christian, disputes soon arose about the succession to the Patriarchate. Since 1450 the Patriarchate had been hereditary in the same family, although it did not descend from father to son, as the Patriarch was forbidden to marry. This arrangement was admittedly uncanonical, but the Assyrians justified it by stating that it prevented bloodshed on the occasion of a vacancy and an

election. In the sixteenth century one of the rival candidates to the Patriarchate appealed to the Pope against another. One hundred years of hesitations and refusals to submit completely to Rome followed, and in 1680 Pope Innocent XI appointed the third Patriarchate, Mar Yusuf, who lived at Diarbek. One hundred years later Mar Elia of the plains, the rival to Mar Shimun of the mountains, submitted to Rome. His followers came to be called Chaldean Uniates, (the Uniate Churches, of which the Chaldeans are only one of several, acknowledge the supremacy of the Pope, but retain their own language, rites and constitution) and were recognized by the Turks as a "Millet" in 1845. In the meantime, the Mar Shimun of the mountains had become a tribal chieftain as well as a religious leader. In these mountains, the Turkish writ hardly existed, and in effect both the Kurds and the Assyrians were independent, divided into clans, and possessing little cohesion. The Assyrians followed Mar Shimun in all matters religious, and on the political side it was through him that the Turkish authorities dealt with the Assyrian mountaineers whenever the necessity arose. Normally, the Assyrians held their own fairly well with their Kurdish neighbours. They were good fighters, and were respected as such. They could hit back if necessary, and not all the raiding and killing was done by one side. There is, indeed, no reason to think that the Assyrians had greater regard for the sanctity of human life and property than had the Kurds, nor that the Kurds generally had a lower standard of conduct - admittedly a rough-and -ready one - in their many raids and fights, than had the Assyrians. In 1847, however, a really bad massacre of Assyrians by Kurds took place, leading to a strong protest from Sir Stratfor Canning, the British Ambassador at Constantinople. (The Turkish Government exiled Badr Khan, the Kurdish Agha responsible for the massacres, perhaps not unwillingly, as it was already seeking to break the power of the several semi-independent Kurdish chieftains in the mountains).

After the succession of Abdul Hamid in 1878, things grew worse for the Assyrians. The new Sultan's policy was to use the Kurds to strengthen his throne, for he feared the Ottomans. His downfall in 1908 promised better things, but the hopes that were centred in the Young Turk movement soon proved vain. The Assyrians now had to compete not only with their wild Kurdish neighbours, but with corrupt officialdom. It was clear some time before the outbreak of the war that a crisis was at hand. In the

meantime contact had been obtained between the Church of England and the mountain Assyrians. The very existence of this Christian remnant was hardly known in England before members of the Euphrates Expedition of 1837 wrote about them. In 1843 the Mar Shimun wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury asking for help. In 1847 at the time of the Badr Khan's Massacres, the life of Mar Shimun was saved by Dr. Badger, a Church of England missionary in Mosul. No definite steps, however, were taken until 1876, when a mission of inquiry was sent out by the Archbishop. This mission thoroughly investigated the position. It found besides the Patriarch Mar Shimun, one Metropolitan and eight Bishops in Turkey, and three in Persia. It was discovered that the people were abysmally ignorant and that even the Bishops could hardly read or write. They appeared to be better judges of a rifle than of a doctrine. As indeed they are to the present day. The Bishop in Jerusalem when he visited the Bishop Sirkis in the summer of 1933 was not a little shocked to find a rifle hanging on the wall of his room and a box of ammunition under his bed. Superstitions and meaningless rites abounded and spiritual life generally was at a low ebb. At the same time there was a marked devotion to the faith. Even among the "rayahs", living as serfs, there was remarkably little apostasy.

In 1886 a Mission was established by the Archbishop of Canterbury in the mountains. Similar Missions had already been established by Americans in the comparatively civilized towns of Mosul and Urmiyah. The express object of the Archbishop's Mission, as he stated in a letter to Mar Shimun, was "to strengthen and illuminate the ancient church – and not to draw anyone from the flock of your Church into new and strange folds". The methods adopted were the opening of schools for priests and deacons and the printing of church books. The results were highly satisfactory and education was at last beginning to spread among the mountaineers, when the outbreak of the Great War caused the Mission to close down.

Shortly before the war a new Mar Shimun, Benjamin, had succeeded to the Patriarchal Chair. Though young, still in his early twenties, he was a man of great courage and energy, and had the times been more favourable, would no doubt have done much for his people. His predecessor, who had held the position for many years, had been weak. Living as he did at Qudshanis, a village in the valley, he was much

under the thumb of the Turkish officials at Julamerk and had little real influence over the mountain tribes. Even then he was the only possible leader of the Assyrian mountaineers. Others might raise factions, but no one but he could ever hope to influence the whole people.

The numbers of the Assyrians in the mountains just before the war appear to have been about forty thousand. Others, perhaps fifteen thousand or twenty thousand in number, lived in the plains to the west of Lake Urmiyeh in Persia. To them the Orthodox Church of Russia had sent a mission, as had the American Presbyterians. The Dominicans, too, maintained a Mission there as well as in Mosul, but in Urmiyah they do not appear to have made many converts. At this time, as will be related later, the influence of Russia in North Persia was very great. The Russian religious Mission in consequence met with some success. A further attempt was made in 1913 to convert the Hakkiari mountaineers to the orthodox faith, but the war intervened before much progress could be made.

CHAPTER II: THE GREAT WAR

When the Great War began the Assyrians, who were already sufficiently anxious about their future, found themselves wooed in turn by the two sides. Before Turkey joined the Central Powers in November 1914, the Governor of the Province of Van had sent for the Mar Shimun and promised him preferential treatment of the Assyrians. It was clear of course, that the Assyrians in their Hakkiari mountains occupied a key position. In the Caucasus highlands the Ottoman Empire marched with the Russian Empire, and the strength of fortified towns such as Erzerum and Erivan indicated the strategic importance of this area. Moreover, the existing Anglo-Russian agreement meant that for all practical purposes Persia was an allied base - British in the south and Russian in the north. Hakkiari, therefore, provided a spearhead for the Turks against the Russians, and here was the motive for the Turkish promises to the Mar Shimun. The Assyrians, he was told would be given arms, and schools would be opened and salaries paid to their religious and tribal leaders. These promises were renewed when Turkey entered the war. Military necessity dictated this, but by this time the Armenian Massacres had commenced. These first massacres were not on the scale of those which took place later, when at least two million Armenian men, women and children lost their lives, but they were enough to show how Christian minorities were likely to fare. According to Turkish statements the Turks at first tried to persuade the Armenians to remain quiet, but whether the Armenians gave any real provocation or not the Turks soon decided that the only way to settle the Armenian question was to exterminate the Armenians, how well they succeeded is now history.

The Assyrians, however, were not the same menace. They were far fewer in numbers and had little political contact with Russia or England. It would be a feather in the caps of the Turkish Government if it could show that, whatever was happening in Armenia, another Christian □millet□was quite content with its lot. The Assyrians at first hesitated. They had good reason. It was clear that if the Allies won the war, they were not likely to deal hardly with the Assyrians for having refused to rise against Turkey. On the other hand, if the Assyrians did rebel, and the Central Powers won the war, punishment was certain. As things turned out, the Allies were victorious, but that did not

help the Assyrians.

The Assyrians had no reason to put much trust in the Turkish promises. The earlier Armenian massacres, small though they were as compared with those which took place later were a beacon of warning. The preaching of the Jehad could hardly be expected to exclude the Assyrian Christians. The Kurds, moreover, were getting more and more out of hand. Those in the South were not likely to abstain from looting, when they knew that, quite apart from the happenings in Armenia proper, Kurdish tribes had already attacked and sacked villages in Albaq district just to the north of the Hakkiari Mountains. Here a large number of Assyrians as well as Armenians were killed. The Russians, too, had commenced to make overtures to the Assyrians.

The first fighting in this part of the world was around Urmiyah. Here there was stationed a Russian consul, whose nominal bodyguard was, in fact, quite a strong garrison. For Urmiyah fell within the Russian sphere of influence. The condition of Persia was indeed an anomaly. Nominally independent, it was divided into spheres of influence, Russian and British - and the Russians, at any rate, made full use of their opportunity in the north. Persia remained theoretically neutral throughout the war, but its country was, for over four years, a battle-ground between the Turks, Russians, and in the end, the British as well. The first Turkish attacks on Urmiyah failed as the Russians sent reinforcements, but they soon were forced to retire in the face of the Turkish thrust towards Batum. This was defeated in January 1915 at the Battle of Sara Kamish and the Russians returned once more to Urmiyah, where they remained in occupation until the outbreak of the Revolution in 1917. Their temporary retirement, however, had left the local Christians defenceless. Upwards of ten thousand fled with the retreating Russians and most of them are living in Russia to this day. Many of the remainder fell victims to massacres, despite the devoted efforts of the American Missions to protect them. Many of the men were killed under the most brutal circumstances and many of the young women and girls were carried off.

The Russians, on their return to Urmiyah and on their capture of Van in April 1915, made further attempts to induce the Assyrians to join them. They promised arms and other material assistance. Finally, though not without reluctance, the Mar Shimun yielded to the pressure of the tribal maliks, who, infuriated by the massacres of

Assyrians at Ilbaq, ardently desired to fight the Turks. Some members of the Patriarchal family, who favoured neutrality and who were suspected of the treachery, were murdered in cold blood.

The Assyrians declared war on Turkey on May 10, 1915, and that was the beginning of their terrible Odyssey. The Turks who brought in the Kurds to help attacked them and burnt the villages in the valleys. They endeavoured to exercise personal pressure on the Mar Shimun by threatening the life of Hormuzd, his brother, who at the beginning of the war was being educated in Constantinople and was now in Mosul. The Governor of this town sent word to Mar Shimun that if the Assyrians dared to rebel Hormuzd would be executed. The Patriarch replied that he had to consider his people rather than his brother and Hormuzd was duly hanged at Mosul, as brutal a murder as any in the bloody annals of the Turks.

The Assyrians then found that the Russian help never came, for the Russian forces were, at the moment, in difficulties elsewhere. All that the Russians sent were four hundred Cossacks, who were treacherously ambushed and annihilated by Kurdish tribesmen. With the Turks in force in front of them, the Assyrians took to the high mountains, wither pursuit was difficult. At 10,000 feet and more life was out of the question in the winter, and so the Turks waited, knowing that the first snows of October would drive the Assyrians down to their doom. A heroic journey was then undertaken by the Mar Shimun himself, who to relieve the sore straits of his people made his perilous way with two companions down to Urmiyah. The Russians there told him that no help would be given and they advised him to remain in Urmiyah and so save himself. With true nobility he refused and made his way back to his people in the mountains. Even in such an apparently hopeless position the Assyrians did not despair but decided that if the Russians would not come to them they would force a way down to Urmiyah themselves. They succeeded, to the astonishment of Russians and Turks alike. Taking an unexpected route, they were able to avoid pursuit - indeed, the Kurds did not pursue with any ardour - and after great hardships the whole people, perhaps forty thousand in all, safely reached Urmiyah.

At Urmiyah they were at first secure, but their presence was a thorn in the side of the Persian authorities. These could hardly be expected to welcome the wild Christian

Highlanders. Fortunately they were too frightened to do much, though one brutal and unprovoked massacre of a hundred Assyrians did take place. The Assyrians themselves, on the testimony of Dr. McDowell, an American missionary at Urmiyah, behaved rather better than might have been expected. They were guilty of some looting certainly, but little in view of what they had suffered. They were employed as irregular troops by the Russians, two battalions being organized under Russian officers and a third under the direct command of the Mar Shimun. In the course of their counter raids against the Kurds, they obtained on more than one occasion a bloody revenge for their lost villages. The Mar Shimun was sent on a visit to Tiflis, where he was received and decorated by the Grand Duke Nicholas. Other decorations were given to other leaders. On the whole from January 1916 until the spring of 1917 the Assyrians led a quiet life. The situation was, as already related, to put it mildly, anomalous. Persia was an independent and neutral country, and yet the Russians were in complete control of Urmiyah. To all intents and purposes the Persian Government did not exist there.

Early in 1917 the Russian front collapsed as a result of the Revolution. The Assyrians were once again deserted by their Allies. In one way they were, however, much better off than before. They had plenty of food, while ample ammunition and rifles had been left behind by the retreating Russians. They were, however, completely and entirely isolated. An attempt to form a front from Baghdad to the Caucasus with the help of Armenians, Kurds, and Assyrians came to nothing. The Armenians, as usual, could not agree among themselves. Simco, Agha of the Shekak Kurds, whom it was hoped to use, was a self-seeking and treacherous scoundrel. He could only be trusted as far as his personal interests were concerned. Persia, though far from belligerent, was passively hostile. The news from the Western Front became at the end of 1917 more and more unfavourable to the Allied Powers. Simco, with his sole desire of being on the winning side, soon deserted, and in February 1918 the Persian authorities plucked up courage to order the Assyrians to surrender their arms. Naturally they refused.

Fighting followed in and around Urmiyah, in which the Assyrians were successful. Soon, however, they were to suffer a crushing blow. In the long history of

the East there are endless instances of hospitable invitations working out to a treacherous and tragic conclusion. Simco invited the Mar Shimun and a few of his followers to a friendly meeting to discuss the immediate present and the possible future. On all hands the Mar Shimun was warned of the risk he was running, but he disregarded all these warnings and accepted the invitation, when he and his followers were attacked without warning and massacred almost to a man by Simco's Kurds. It is perhaps, satisfactory to be able to relate that Simco, after a life given to treachery and violence, was in 1930, himself killed by the Persians under circumstances of almost equal treachery.

The Assyrians did not take the murder of their leader lying down. They attacked and captured Simco's castle at Chara and there found a letter from the Persian Governor to Tabriz, in which it was suggested that the Mar Shimun

should be murdered. They also carried out by way of retaliation a minor massacre of their own against the Kurds in Urmiyah.

In the meantime the Turks had recovered their strength. They had recaptured Erzerum and its arsenal and were now unusually well equipped. Two divisions were sent down to Urmiyah to deal with the Armenians and Assyrians. The Commander, Ali Ihsan Bey, was a particularly competent soldier. The Armenians, according to their unfortunate habit, were at loggerheads among themselves, but one of their leaders, Andrianik, at any rate proved himself to be a good fighting soldier. To the Assyrians the loss of the Mar Shimun was a catastrophe. His brother and successor was young and weak in health. He died two years later of consumption in the Baqubah Camp. The Assyrians, like the Armenians, were divided. Their best fighting leader was Agha Petros, of the Baz Tribe. He had, however, a rather lurid past, and was in no way likely to unite the Assyrians, especially as the family of the Mar Shimun was opposed to him. Nevertheless, the Assyrians were able to hold their own against the Turks, whom they defeated on several occasions. They remained in control of Urmiyah, but as the months passed their ammunition was giving out. Once again their situation was critical.

Shortly before this the "Dunsterforce" had set out on its adventures towards Baku. General Dunsterville desired to protect his left flank as far as possible. The most obvious means of doing so was to obtain contact at Urmiyah with the Assyrians and Armenians, news of whose successful resistance to the Turks had, in due course, reached the British in Baghdad. The Assyrians willingly agreed to help, provided British officers were sent to lead them, as they no longer trusted even those Russian officers who had remained with them. It was decided to send a body of seventy-five British officers and N.C.O.s to Urmiyah, and Colonel McCarthy was appointed to command this mission. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, the officers needed for this mission were not immediately available. A small detachment of the 14th Hussars was sent up from Hamadan and reached a place named Sain Kala, about a hundred miles south of Urmiyah. On July 8th, Captain Pennington of the Royal Air Force, after a very daring flight over the mountains, managed to land at Urmiyah. At first he was in danger from the bullets of the Assyrians, who did not know who he was, and then from their too enthusiastic reception when they realized that he was British. His arrival naturally

encouraged them greatly, but he could bring tidings of little immediate help. However, in due course, a plan of campaign was sketched out. The Assyrians at this time were being attacked from two sides, the north and the southwest. It was arranged that the northern front should be held firmly, while Agha Petros should attack the Kurds in Sauj Bulak to the southwest. He should then get in touch with the British detachment of Sain Kala and thus replenish his failing supplies of ammunition. At first all went well. Agha Petros duly defeated the Turks in Sauj Bulak and drove them back to Rowanduz. Then, as nearly always happens where irregular forces are concerned, the usual muddles followed. Agha Petros had no real control over Assyrians or Armenians, and was indeed greatly mistrusted by many of them. There was deep disunion in the ranks. Instead of posting a force to contain the Turks whom he had just defeated, in case they should return, he moved on with all his forces to Sain Kala, which reached seven days after the appointed time to find that the British detachment had retired. The northern front then wavered, as the Assyrians there thought that they had been betrayed by Agha Petros. The Turks attacked them while they were wavering and the front gave.

And so began the dreadful retreat, and the Assyrians and Armenians in Urmiyah fled south and the retreat soon became a panic-stricken rout. They moved with all their families, all their livestock, and all their belongings. The searing heat of the late summer was in itself a disadvantage, and the melancholy procession had scarcely started when they were attacked from all sides by Turks, Kurds and Persians alike. As the territory through which they were making their painful way was largely Kurdish, the Kurdish attacks were the most numerous; the fact that any got through at all is proof that the Kurds, as usual, were anxious to loot rather than face bullets. There have been many dire retreats in military history, but this katabasis of the Assyrians must take its place as one of the most tragic. Their sufferings were intense, and before they made their way through to British territory they had lost one-third of their numbers. Not only were they the object of continual attacks by night and ambushes by day, but the struggling and starving mass were stricken by all manner of disease - typhus, dysentery, smallpox, cholera, and fevers. Many of those who did not succumb to disease dropped out and died by the wayside of sheer exhaustion. The line of the retreat was marked by an endless trail of dead: men, women, and children who had

dropped in their tracks while on the march or were left dying when the camp was struck each tragic dawn. They had little food and little water, and Colonel McCarthy, who had by now come up, had described how whenever they camped for the night the site next morning was littered with dead and dying. Families were too dispirited to mourn those left behind, and no sooner had the camp moved off than the ghoulish tribesmen swooped down, killed off those who were not dead, and stripped the bodies of whatever might be on them. More than seventy thousand Assyrians started out on this dreadful retreat; fewer than fifty thousand reached Hamadan. Those who died in their tracks were perhaps fortunate; ten thousand were cut off by marauding tribesmen and have never been heard of again. Their men were no doubt massacred and their women and girls distributed round the countryside.

Probably little else could have been expected; the retreating mass was encumbered with families and livestock, and, much more serious, there was no leadership and no cohesion. The retreat was a rabble. Under organized leadership advance parties, rear guards, and flank guards would have been put out, and in such an orderly retreat the losses would not have been nearly so heavy nor would their morale have been so impaired. As it was, each tribe and each section fought on its own. Hard put to it as they were for supplies on their terrible journey, they would stop to pillage inoffensive villages. The stronger, too, marched on regardless of the peril of the weak who fell by the way. This hopeless rout continued until a tiny British contingent of three officers and four men of the 14th Hussars, returning to see if they be of any help, came upon a body of four hundred Kurds. Without hesitation these seven men charged and drove the Kurds off. (For this action the Commander of this fighting force received a well-deserved D.S.O.). Such was the effect of this brave action that from that time onwards the Kurds never dared to attack the Assyrians again. And so the remnants of this fighting nation straggled into Hamadan and made contact with the British troops.

Compared with the gigantic scale of the war on the Western Front, even the side-shows of Gallipoli and Mesopotamia, the part taken by the Assyrians in the Great War had been insignificant, but the suffering of the individual, whether physical or spiritual, is just as acute in a small show as in a big one. It can be said in all justice that the Assyrians had done their best in hopeless circumstances and that few would have done

better. They had twice been betrayed by the Russians, but they still carried on, trusting now to the British. As a reward they have lost their former homes and more than one-third of their original numbers. When it is considered how much the Arabs have gained with infinitely less suffering and loss, it is impossible not to agree with the Assyrians to the extent of admitting they have indeed been unlucky.

CHAPTER III: REFUGEES

The arrival of this mass of fifty thousand destitute refugees in Hamadan naturally created an awkward problem for the military authorities. It was manifestly impossible for the Assyrians to remain there. Northern Persia was already living on the borderline of starvation. It was, however, with considerable reluctance that it was decided that they should be sent down to Mesopotamia. These hungry mouths would add considerably to the already great difficulties of rationing, and there was every risk of outbreaks of disease. On the way down from Urmiyah they had already suffered greatly from dysentery and even typhus. But there was no alternative. Most of the able-bodied men were formed into four battalions, and a fifth was formed of the Armenians. These were commanded by British officers with the assistance of British N.C.O.s. In August 1918 the threat of a Turkish thrust in the direction of Teheran still existed. It was intended to use these battalions to meet it. The Assyrians were quite willing to fight though they strongly objected to being used as labour battalions. They had only two desires: to punish the Turks and to return to their former homes. As it happened, they were not employed before the Armistice was declared. Soon after this they followed the rest down to Baquba. They went sorely against their wills, as they felt they were leaving their home lands still father behind. A project indeed had been mooted that, led by their British officers, they should return to Urmiyah and thence to Hakkiari. No obstacles could have been expected except those provided by the weather. Turkey was prostrate, the Persians weak, and the Kurds unlikely to fight. Nothing came of this plan, but if it had been successfully carried out, the Powers at Versailles would have been faced with a fait accompli, which they would, no doubt, have been only too willing to accept. In August the rest of the refugees had started off again from Hamadan on the last portion of their five hundred mile trek. They were gradually shepherded down to Baquba, a town some thirty miles northeast of Baghdad. Here an enormous refugee camp was established. It was at first run on approved military lines, and the cost was high. In June 1919, nearly a year after the Armistice, Colonel F. Cunliffe Owen took charge. He succeeded in reducing the cost of the camp from about £80,000 British to £40,000 a month. Nevertheless, the total expenditure on the part of the British

government for these refugees exceeded three million pounds, a mere nothing, perhaps, compared with the vast sums which had been, and were still being poured into the arid plains of Mesopotamia, but enough to justify any claim that the British might care to put forward that they had carried out a piece of really great humanitarian work.

The total number of Assyrians and Armenians who passed through the camp was 48,927. The total number of Assyrians still in the camp on October 1, 1919, was 24,579, with 14,612 Armenians. Of the Assyrians about two-thirds were from the Hakkiari mountains and Turkish subjects. Most of the remainder were Persian subjects from Urmiyah.

Naturally, when the refugees reached the camp, they were in a pitiable condition after their mental and physical sufferings. They obviously required rest. But they soon recovered under the healthy conditions of the camp. The death rate, which was at first high, sixty and more a day, became extraordinarily low. In 1919 it was reduced to three per thousand, a figure which compares most favourably with that of 14.6 per thousand in the concentration camps in South Africa from 1900 to 1902. This was all the more remarkable as the climate of Iraq, where the temperature in the summer frequently reaches 120 in the shade, was entirely different from that to which the mountaineers were accustomed. For most of their villages were situated at an altitude of 4,000 to 5,000 feet, and in the summer, they went up higher still. These results reflect great credit on the British Medical Staff. They also show how greatly preventive medicine had improved in the past twenty years.

In another way, however, the Assyrians suffered. Dr. Wigram, in his book, "The Assyrians and their Neighbours", writes: "The administration (of the camp) erred on the side of kindness. Maintenance in idleness is good for neither Eastern nor Western, and the Assyrian is a type that shows the evil results of it sooner than others". Even before the war there had been some reason to think that the Assyrians might fall ready victims to pauperization. Mr. Athelstane Riley in 1886 reported to the Archbishop of Canterbury that to proceed on a begging tour in England or America was the highest ambition of any Assyrian. He appeared to take a rather gloomy view of their character, for he wrote: "I can only say of all the Nestorians and Assyrians who have visited England

during the last few years, I cannot call to mind one, whose words I would believe, where his interests are concerned, or to whom I would entrust with any confidence the smallest sum of money. It was only natural that now they should speedily acquire a refugee mentality. Indeed, this has been ever since 1919 the greatest curse of the Assyrians. It has largely destroyed their morale and generally has done them an infinity of harm.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to make the camp in any way self-supporting, so as to provide work for the refugees. Any such project would have entailed large initial outlay, and it was never intended that the camp should be anything but temporary. Apart from this, few of the men were skilled in anything but agricultural labour. The men, as a whole, were disinclined to work at all. Parties were from time to time sent out to work compulsorily, but these proved unsatisfactory.

It was interesting to observe how rapidly the Assyrians picked up the new ideas which just after the war deluded so many people in an exhausted world. Their hopes of reviving the ancient Assyrian Empire rose high. And as the days passed their claims grew more and more expansive. Finally, they demanded a kingdom stretching from Kifri, south of Kirkuk, to Diarbeke. They appear to have forgotten that even if all the Assyrians in the world were collected together, they would only form a small minority in this area. They also forgot that the absolute essential to the formation of a nation was unity, and even at Hamadan the British officers found the divisions among the Assyrians confusing and humiliating.

The question had arisen at once as to what was to be done with them. The refugees themselves had no other desire but to return to their former homes, and that as soon as possible. The British Government earnestly desired the same thing. But many difficulties were in the way. To leave the Armenians for the moment aside, it must be pointed out that the Assyrians did not all come from the same district. As regards the Persian subjects from Urmiyah, the difficulties, though considerable were not insuperable, and in due course most of them did return to their former homes. But they could not return at once. The Persian Government was, perhaps naturally, not at all anxious to have them back. It objected that the Province of Azerbaijan was in a state of turmoil, and that their return was unsafe. A British officer, Major Eadie, visited Urmiyah and found bitter feeling existing against the Assyrians. For during their stay at Urmiyah

the mountaineers had not always behaved as well as they might have. True, they had much provocation, but the Persians had forgotten the provocation and remembered only the excesses.

With the Hakkiari mountaineers the problem was still more difficult. This district remained, after the Armistice, north of the de facto frontier, which later became known as the Brussels Line, and within the borders of Turkey. The Turks refused to have the Assyrians back. The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1915 had placed Mosul and the surrounding country under the French sphere of influence. Until the British and French agreed to modify this arrangement, the British authorities had no real or permanent authority in the north. Nor was the local situation there at all secure. The Kurds in the mountains were not yet under control; they never really had been in the days of the Turks. Turkish propaganda was now keeping them active.

Apart from all this, the Assyrians had no leader. The murder of the Mar Shimun, Benjamin, in 1918, has already been related. He had been a man of character and courage. His successor, a younger brother, was an invalid and died at Baquba in 1920. He was succeeded by a nephew, aged eleven, who naturally could not exert any real influence. The most dominant personality was his aunt, Surma Khahum. But she had gone to England in the autumn of 1919 to plead the cause of the Assyrians, and she was absent for over a year. In any case a male leader was needed. None was available, and in consequence there was no sort of unanimity amongst the Assyrians. Even amongst the mountaineers each clan sought only to return to its own group of villages, quite regardless of the others, and equally regardless of the advantages of living in a more homogeneous state than they had possessed before the war.

Under these circumstances Agha Petros appeared to be the only possible man to lead. Mention had already been made of him as a successful fighting leader. It was, however, unlikely that even he could weld the people into one. His doubtful antecedents had made him suspect. Before the war he had been in America, making a living by selling carpets, as a confidence trickster, and in still more disreputable ways. It was even reputed that he had there killed his man. His open hostility to the house of the Mar Shimun, whose claim to temporal power he resented, further weakened his position. However, he had a definite plan. He proposed that the mountaineers and the

Assyrians from the Urmiyah plain should combine to regain part of their former territory, and there form a combined Assyrian Nation. Here the refugees at Baquba could be joined by the other Assyrians who were scattered over Russia and Persia. How far the Persian Government had been consulted regarding this plan is not quite clear. It was essential that it should agree, as most of the land for this Assyrian enclave lay within the borders of Persia.

After long arguments and discussions all the Urmiyans and about two-thirds of the mountaineers accepted this plan. Agha Petros realized that under existing circumstances it would be impossible for all the mountaineers to return to their Hakkiari homes, but he hoped that it would be possible to regain the mountain country from Gawar eastwards, where they would be in close touch with the Assyrians of Urmiyah. After full consideration the British authorities agreed to this plan, and undertook to give to the Assyrians a number of rifles equivalent to those which had been in their possession when they were disarmed at Baquba. If this plan succeeded, there appeared some hope that an Assyrian Nation might be set up, but the one essential to success was unanimity, and throughout there were many signs that this was just what was lacking.

However, the attempt was made. Largely owing to the driving power of Sir Arnold Wilson, then Civil Commissioner in Mesopotamia, the first section of the Assyrians, families and all, left Baquba at the end of April 1920. A new camp was opened at Mindan, a small village some thirty miles northeast of Mosul. Further arrangements were made for an advance camp at Aqra at the foot of the mountains. Unfortunately, during the summer the Arab Rebellion broke out, and this naturally upset most of the arrangements. The railway line was cut in several places, and the British military forces were otherwise engaged. The camps at Baquba and Mindan were themselves attacked by the Arabs, but, despite inadequate rifle power, were successfully defended, the Assyrians in Mindan even pursuing and punishing their attackers. In fact, Sir Aylmer Haldane in his book, "The Insurrection In Mesopotamia", wrote: "But for this entirely fortuitous support a large proportion of Mosul division might have been swamped by a wave of anarchy".

It was now decided, largely on account of the food difficulty, that the Baquba

camp should be evacuated. The Assyrians who still remained in it, were sent up to Mosul and the Armenians were dispatched to Basra to await shipment. The evacuation was completed by the end of September, a piece of work greatly to the credit of Colonel Cunliffe Owen and his assistants in view of the great difficulties which they had to face. But much time had been lost. Sir Arnold Wilson had now handed over to Sir Percy Cox, but he too approved of Agha Petros's scheme and it was decided to carry on with it.

By the middle of October it had been possible, despite a good deal of incompetence on the part of Agha Petros, to concentrate six thousand armed men at Aqra. A number of them had been employed by the British military authorities as tribal levies in the mountains northeast of Mosul, and had done good service. These had some slight idea of discipline. The remainder had little or none. The route lay over the Aqra Dagh and then into Barzan territory. Thence to Neri and so northeast to Urmiyah. Arrangements had been made with the Kurdish Aghas not to oppose the march of the Assyrians, and the slight opposition offered was easily brushed aside.

Unfortunately, on arrival in the Varzan country, divisions broke out in the ranks of the Assyrians which effectively ruined the whole plan. The mountaineers, now not far from their old Hakkiari homes, could not resist the temptation of trying to return there. It was at least possible that, unknown to the British authorities and to the Urmiyans, Agha Petros had made separate promises to the mountaineers. In any case they broke away from the Urmiyans, who, deprived of the assistance of the best fighting men, were unable to advance and eventually returned with Agha Petros to Mindan. The mountaineers, too, failed. Winter comes early in the mountains, and the climatic conditions were too much even for them. They made matters still worse by unprovoked attacks on the Kurds. They burnt the villages and killed the villagers. True, some of these Kurds had been their enemies in 1915, and had helped to drive them from their homes, but others were entirely inoffensive. The behaviour of the Assyrians merely aggravated an already difficult situation and created bitter feeling, which remains to this day. It also did the British much harm. The Kurds knew that the Assyrians had had British officers with them - actually two accompanied Agha Petros in his enterprise, though only in the capacity of observers. They could not believe that the Assyrians were not acting under British orders. This caused much hostility, and made the Kurds

all the readier to listen to the intense Turkish propaganda, which was coming from over the frontier.

CHAPTER IV: THE SETTLEMENTS IN IRAQ

The failure of Agha Petros's enterprise showed that, for the time being at any rate, there was no hope of the formation of any Assyrian kingdom. The British Government was not prepared indefinitely to continue maintaining the Assyrians in idleness. Indeed, nothing would have been more harmful to the Assyrians. It was therefore decided to encourage the Assyrians to settle on the land wherever they could. They consisted, as already noted, of three main groups: (1) those from Urmiyah, who were Persian subjects. In due course most of these have been able to return to their old homes, where they are now living much as before the war. A recent visitor to Urmiyah has reported that it is difficult to distinguish them from the Persian Moslems. Their return, however, was gradual. The Persian Government, though it eventually gave way, was, as already related, by no means enthusiastic about having them back. Even now there are nearly five hundred families of them still in Iraq. Many of these are employed in the towns, in particular in Baghdad. A few have settled on the land.

(2) The second group consisted of those who before the war were living as "rayahs" under the Kurdish Aghas in Barwari Bala and Nerwa Raikan. These districts are situated south of the Brussels Line (this eventually became the permanent frontier between Turkey and Iraq. See Chapter VI) and fall within the borders of Iraq. There was no particular difficulty regarding the return of these people, who numbered about eight hundred families. The Kurdish Aghas were glad to see the return of their best cultivators. They duly returned and their lot became much better than it had been before the war, as the Iraqi Government has established a far stronger and more efficient administration than the Turks had ever achieved, and the power of the Kurdish Aghas for good or evil has been materially weakened. At first the main danger to these Assyrians consisted of attacks from Kurds from over the frontier, where there was practically no government control. A number of raids and murders did take place at first, but things have greatly improved during the last three or four years.

(3) The third and most important group consisted of the Hakkiari mountaineers, ex-Ottoman subjects, whose lands, north of the Brussels Line, lay in Turkish territory. In 1920 they were estimated to number over three thousand families (a family is generally

taken as representing five persons, men, women, and children).

The Mindan refugee camp was closed down in the summer of 1921, the Assyrians being encouraged to settle. Each man, woman, and child received Rs.120 (£9), the money, as usual, coming out of the pocket of the British taxpayer. A large number of the younger men joined the Levies, which force was being formed at this time as will be related later. A British official was appointed to direct the settlement of the remainder. By the autumn of 1921 it was reported that the following was the rough distribution of Assyrians in the province of Mosul:

Settled and repatriated north of Amadiyah	6,950 souls
Settled in Amadiyah district	1,100 souls
Settled in Dohuk, Akho, Aqra, and Sheikhan	7,450 souls

Of the new settlements the most satisfactory and permanent were those of the Jilu and Baz sections in the plain of the Sheikhan district.

In 1922 the whole of the Upper and Lower Tiyari, the two most important tribes, together with the Tukhuma and some of the Jilu and Baz, proceeded to their pre-war homes in Hakkiari. They appear to have met with no opposition from the Turks, whose authority in those parts at that time was almost nonexistent. For the next two years, that is until autumn of 1924, the Assyrian settlement problem appeared, on the face of it, to have ended, as with the return of the majority of the refugees to their pre-war homes there were ample lands in the Mosul and Arbil provinces for the settlement of the remainder.

In August 1924, however, an affray occurred between a party of Tukhuma tribesmen, the wildest of all the Assyrians, and the Turkish Vali of Julamerk, who was on a revenue-collecting tour. The Tukhuma captured his baggage and though they soon returned it, the Turkish Government decided to take revenge. Indeed, there is little doubt that the Turks were determined to evict the Assyrians at the first opportunity. A large military force was collected and immediate steps were taken to drive the Assyrians out of Turkey. The Turks succeeded. The Assyrians, who were incapable of serious resistance owing to the absence of most of their fighting men in Levy service in Iraq,

fled back into Iraq territory, whither they were pursued by the Turkish military forces. Further incursions were, however, stopped by the Levies, backed up by Assyrian Irregulars, who had been collected by Surma Khanum, the aunt of the Mar Shimun, and by Bishop Yuwallaha. The Bishop himself, in the true Assyrian style, joined in the fray. He handed his cassock to a deacon and led a successful charge, Surma was awarded the M.B.E. for her services.

As a result of the expulsion of the Assyrians from Hakkiari, the Iraqi Government was once again faced with the problem of Assyrian settlement. Nor was the moment propitious. The rising tide of Iraqi Nationalism had by now come in contact with the alien sympathies and aspirations of the Assyrian race. The Iraqi politicians were jealous of the favours - the remissions of taxation, grants of land, and other privileges - which had been shown the Assyrian refugees, while the Assyrians were apt to regard themselves as British protégés and held aloof from Iraqi officialdom. The enlistment of Assyrians in the Levies was another factor. It is true that the Assyrian Levies were on no occasion used against the Arabs. Their employment in the guerrilla warfare against the Kurds was entirely in the interests of the Iraqi State. But the Levies were Imperial troops and as such were suspect to the ardent Iraqi Nationalist. Jealousy was almost inevitable, and this was increased by the slighting manner in which a few British officers in the Levies were wont to speak of the new Iraqi Army, which was in process of formation, and which in its first operations against the Kurds was far from successful. The situation was aggravated by the Levy outbreak at Kirkuk in May 1924 - a similar outbreak had been narrowly averted in Mosul nine months earlier. At Kirkuk the Levies, admittedly after suffering a good deal of provocation, ran amok and killed fifty of the townspeople, including a sheikh of much religious sanctity. What ever may have been the provocation, this outbreak on the part of disciplined troops was a serious blot on the good name of the Assyrians. The Iraqi Government, be it said, behaved in a very magnanimous manner, and the nine Levy soldiers found guilty at a trial, were released after having served a comparatively short term of imprisonment, and received a free pardon.

On May 31, 1924, less than a month after the Levy outbreak, the High Commissioner, in an endeavour to pour oil on the troubled water, issued the following

announcement:

His Majesty's Government have given the most careful consideration for some time to the question of safeguarding the interests of the Assyrian people, keeping in view both the services which they rendered to the Allied cause during the war and their future relations with the Iraqi State. They have decided to press for a frontier as far north as possible so as to include the greater part of the Assyrian people other than those who belong to districts subject to the Persian Government. Within this frontier it is hoped to include the mountains occupied by the Tiyari, the Tukhuma, Jilu, and Baz tribes, and to provide a home within the territory of the Iraqi State, not only for those who belong to these districts, but also for scattered Assyrians, whose home is not in Persia.

His Excellency, the High Commissioner has ascertained that there are more than sufficient deserted lands, the property of the Iraqi Government, to the north of Dohuk, in Amadiva in the northern hills, upon which the latter class of persons could be permanently settled.

Having decided that this policy was the best calculated to serve the interests not only of the Assyrians but also of the Iraqi State, His Majesty's Government have invited the Iraqi Government to give assurances upon the following points, which were considered to be essential to its success:

(1) That the Iraqi Government will assign the vacant lands under reference above to the Assyrians free of cost and on favourable terms.

(2) That the Iraqi Government will grant both to those Assyrians who are thus resettled in lands to be newly assigned, and to those of the Tiyari, Tukhuma, Baz and Jilu country (if secured for Iraq from the Turkish Government) a generous measure of liberty in the management of their own purely local affairs, such as the choice of their own village headmen, and the

> *making of adequate arrangements in each village for the collection and payment, subject to the supervision of the Iraqi Government, of such taxes as that Government may fix.*
>
> *These assurances have now been given by the Iraqi Government and the settlement of the frontier is under negotiation. His Majesty's Government trust that it may be possible in the course to bring the policy which has been outlined into effect, and believe that, if it is possible to do so, it will ensure to the Assyrian people a sufficient and congenial area for settlement and freedom for the settlement of their local affairs.*

The Iraqi Government had no alternative but to consider favourably the recommendations of the High Commissioner, since, without the backing of Great Britain, it was almost certain that the whole of the Vilayet of Mosul would be lost to Turkey.

The eviction of the Assyrians from Hakkiari still further complicated the situation. As a temporary measure, as many families as possible were settled in the Sheikhan, Barwari Bala, and Dohuk districts, a few families spread eastward to the Dasht-I-Harir, and round Batas in Arbil Liwa. Others scattered through the towns in Iraq.

As it was still hoped that when the northern frontier as finally delimited by the League of Nations, the Hakkiari highlands would be included in Iraq, the refugees remained in the areas allotted to them, though they were not definitely settled. These people were completely destitute, and road making schemes were organized in the Mosul area as relief measures.

In December 1925, however, the resolution adopted by the Council of the League awarded to Turkey the bulk of the territory formerly inhabited by the ex-Ottoman Assyrians, and all hopes of repatriating them were finally dispelled. It was then apparent that the Assyrians could find homes nowhere but in Iraq. Sir Henry Dobbs, who was now High Commissioner in Baghdad, had made some tentative inquiries as to the possibility of their being settled somewhere in the British Empire - Canada in particular was mentioned - but no satisfactory replies were received. Nor had the Assyrians at that time shown any enthusiasm for such a project.

The Tragedy of the Assyrians

During 1926 various areas in Northern Iraq were suggested as being suitable for the settlement of the refugees, among them the Surchi areas (Mosul and Arbil Liwa), Rania district (Arbil Liwa), the Shahrazor Plain (Suleimaniyah Liwa), and the Barazgird Valley in the Baradost nahya of Arbil. Nothing of the size of the area required for a homogeneous settlement was, however, available, unless the Kurdish inhabitants of those districts were to be dispossessed of property owned by them for generations and then resettled in other parts of Iraq. This would have been a manifest injustice and must have led to intense ill feeling between Assyrians and Kurds. There had been just a possibility of something of this nature being done in 1920. Sir Arnold Wilson, then Acting Civil Commissioner, had recommended that the Assyrians should be settled in the Supna Valley west of Amadiyah. He wrote as follows to the Secretary of State for India; (At this time Mesopotamian affairs were still being dealt with by the India Office. Not until after the Cairo Conference of 1921 were they transferred to the Colonial Office. On the termination of the Mandate in 1932, they reverted to the Foreign Office.) "This plan provides an opportunity of doing justice to the Assyrian community in a manner acceptable alike to themselves and to European ideas of right and justice. It will enable us to solve one of the most difficult questions of religious and racial incompatibilities in Kurdistan, to dispose of a grave menace to the future peace of Northern Mesopotamia, and to punish those responsible for the outrages at Amadiyah. This opportunity will not occur again." Sir Arnold estimated that this scheme would necessitate the eviction of some two thousand Kurdish families, but he considered that ample land was available for them in the neighbourhood, and he recommended that they should receive some monetary compensation. In his opinion and that of many other people the Kurds deserved little consideration in view of their continual revolts and their cold-blooded murders of British officers. In the light of after events it is doubtful whether even this scheme would have worked well, but whether it would or not, the opportunity had finally passed by 1926.

The most suitable and the largest area appeared to be that of the Barazgird Valley in Baradost. Here it was reported that the great majority of the former Kurdish inhabitants had perished or had left as the result of famine and military invasions during the Great War. A committee was therefore appointed to investigate. It reported that,

even with a considerable amount of pioneer work, the Valley could only provide accommodation for 473 families. The Assyrians, who had been members of the Committee, were, moreover, far from enthusiastic. They stated that if they had to settle here they would only do so on the following conditions:

1. Leases to be given direct by the Government, and not through Kurdish Aghas
2. Loan of seed
3. Loan of plough animals
4. Free transport from Mosul
5. Supplies of food to the cultivators who were sent up to prepare the land for cultivation

The Iraqi Government eventually approved of the scheme. But in the end nothing came of it. The Assyrians raised more objections. They said that the area was too far away and too isolated. The survivors of the Baradost Kurds began to put in claims to the land, while Sheikh Ahmed of Barzan, whose neighbouring territory was still not administered by the Government, gave signs that he might use his strength to upset public security.

In the meantime other efforts were made to settle the Assyrians. On March 8, 1927, the Council of Ministers passed the following resolution:

A. That the Ministry of the Interior should endeavour to settle the refugees at present found in the Northern zone in such lands and villages as it might consider suitable for their settlement, without regard to race, and without discrimination between them.

B. That these refugees should be informed that the Government was prepared to grant special exemption to every individual who would develop and till land and comply with the advice and orders of the Government in accordance with the laws of the country.

C. That the settlement of refugees in localities where their settlement might be objected to be neighbouring Governments, or by the original inhabitants on account of Haq el Qarar or on any other legitimate reason, should be avoided.

It will be noted that in this resolution no mention is made of Assyrians. The Iraqi Government throughout endeavoured to avoid such official mention. It wished to make no difference between Assyrian, Kurd, or Arab refugees. There were, indeed, some Kurds and Arabs who needed land, but their problem was essentially different to that of the Assyrians, and it was unfortunate that the Iraqi Ministers refused to face the facts. Of course they understood the problem quite well, and their only reason for not saying so officially was political. The Assyrians for their part were not easy to help. To every plan they raised every possible objection. They too, appeared to be unable to face the hard facts, or to realize that any settlement in homogeneous groups was impossible. There simply was not the land. A proof of their attitude is contained in a report dated July 28, 1927, from the British Administrative Inspector at Mosul:

The Qaimaqam (Administratively Iraq is divided into Liwas - provinces. These Liwas again are divided into Qodhas - districts and Nahyas - sub-districts. The chief administrative official of a Liwa is the Mutaserrif, of the Qodha, the Qaimaqam, and of the Nahya, the Mudir), Amadia has summoned the Assyrians concerned and made them offers, i.e. that certain Assyrian communities should be offered settlements in the way here set forth:

1,000 Upper Tiyari in Barwari Zair,
1,500 Upper Tiyari in Nahla (Aqra),
1,000 Upper Tiyari in Government villages in Doski,
4,000 Lower Tiyari in Barwari Zair,
Alamun and Garamus sections in Chamsus.

The Upper and Lower Tiyari have replied that the Government need not bother its head about settling them until next spring, when the Assyrians will announce their decision.

The Alamun people have replied that they are already at Chamsus and could not bear to think of the Garamus people coming to the same place, and the Garamus people say that they do not intend to move from Chalki.

I think that we shall find things difficult if we persist in trying to settle the Assyrians in tribes and communities.

A little later, in September, a petition was received bearing forty-six signatures

from the Chiefs of the upper and Lower Tiyari, the Tukhuma, and the Diz, in which it was stated that the Government had offered to settle them in empty villages, with very little water and bad climate, and that they have no intention of living in Iraq even if the Government offered them settlement in better villages. The truth of the matter was that the Assyrians had never really lost hope that sooner or later they would be able to return to Hakkiari.

In July 1927 Captain Fowraker, a Levy officer, who spoke Syriac fluently, was appointed to undertake the settlement work. He was to be under the direct orders of the High Commissioner. He, too, at first found that the Assyrians were difficult to help. The High Commissioner (the late Sir Henry Dobbs, G.C.M.G., who had succeeded Sir Percy Cox in 1924), appreciated these difficulties, as is shown by the following letter, written by an observer in close touch with the situation, of August 14, 1927:

> As regards the proposed settlements in Ismail Beg's villages, Batas, Dasht-I-Harir, etc., the objection raised by the Assyrians that they cannot leave their present habitations "at such short notice" is not understood. Precisely the same objection was raised by them when an attempt was made to move them to these villages in the autumn of last year when they asked to be permitted to wait until the spring of this year. In April Sir Henry Dobbs visited Mosul, and in consultation with Mar Yusef and his people it was decided that August would be the best month for the move. Now it appears that the Assyrians object to moving not merely this month but this year. In these circumstances the excuse that they have been given insufficient notice is absurd.

Captain Fowraker carried on his arduous task until November 1928. He was considerably handicapped by shortage of funds, as but little (about £4000) remained of the Lunn Fund, which was made up of subscriptions collected in England and America in 1924.

During the remainder of the year 1927 and throughout 1928, he moved constantly among the Assyrian tribes, investigating their needs, inspecting possible settlement sites, interviewing Government officials and local land-lords, drawing up leases for the settlers, and with the funds at his disposal assisting families to move into the new and more suitable settlement areas. The difficulties were very great, but by

degrees he was able to effect redistributions, with the object of grouping the settlers as far as possible according to their tribes, and also of making the best use of the available sites. The Assyrians, however, were still not satisfied and the Mar Shimun wrote to the high Commissioner a letter of complaint. To this letter the Administrative Inspector at Mosul, Major Wilson, who in November 1928 took over the settlement work from Captain Fowraker, replied with the following summary of the situation:

1. Both the Assyrian Settlement Officer (Captain Fowraker) and myself strongly disagree with the statement that there are still very many misunderstandings occurring between some of the Iraqi Government officials and the Assyrians. The experience of the Assyrians Settlement Officer and myself goes to show that in 99 percent of the cases the Iraqi officials deal with the Assyrians with tact and consideration. Very considerable portions of the newly settled Assyrians recently submitted petitions to the Mutaserrif and myself to the effect that they wished to deal directly with the Iraqi Government officials, and did not wish any interference by the Mar Shimun. Both the Qaimaqams of Dohuk and Amadia, in whose areas the majority of the Assyrians are settled, are very popular with Assyrians, and handle them impartially and well.

2. Captain Fowraker and I also entirely disagree with the Mar Shimun's contention that the majority of the Assyrians are still unsettled. Not more than 500 houses now remain to be settled. It is certain also that some of these are at present "unsettleable" as they are malcontents of various kinds who either wish to return to Turkey or are naturally wanderers. These 500 houses include about 250 houses who wish to settle in the Baradost. About Rs. 6,000 (£450) remain from the Lunn Fund, and it is proposed to earmark at least Rs. 5,000 of this for the Baradost settlement.

Poverty amongst the Assyrians in this Liwa is nonexistent, and man for man they are more prosperous than their Kurdish, Christian, or Yezidi neighbours. They have, however, as a nation a great fondness for money, and having acquired in addition a certain refugee mentality they look upon the British Government and charitable funds as cows to be milked to the ultimate drop.

During 1929 and 1930 settlement continued under his direction, and by the end of 1930 it was estimated that only about three hundred families still required settlement.

Of these a considerable number belonged to the Ashuti section of the Lower Tiyari tribe, and were primarily shepherds. The Baradost scheme remained under consideration, but the Assyrians still rejected it, even though the Minister of Interior agreed to a force of Levies being sent up in 1931 to prepare the ground. The scheme was abandoned for the time being in the autumn of 1931, in view of the raiding into that area which had been carried out by the followers of Sheikh Ahmed of Barzan.

Such was the position when the British Mandate over Iraq came to an end in October 1932. (The locality of the Assyrian Settlements show the most southerly and westerly villages were situated on the rolling and treeless downs which gradually rise from the Tigris Valley to meet the first of the Kurdish Mountains. Others lay in the valleys of these mountains, which as one goes farther north gradually increase in height, those around Dohuk being generally about 4,000 feet, while to the north of Amadiyah they rise to 7,000 - 8,000 feet. The lowland villages, of which Simmel was the largest, were generally the most healthy, though in scenery less picturesque than those in the mountain valleys. The villages around Aqra were perhaps the most malarial). To put it briefly, the great majority of the agricultural Assyrians had been settled. It is true that by no means all of them had been settled in villages where the leases were given direct by the Government. Many of the villages belonged to Kurdish landlords. This was one of the grievances of the Assyrians. As tenants at will they were nervous as to their security of tenure. There had been, it is true, a few cases - though only very few - of Assyrians being turned out of villages in which they had been settled, but this was, perhaps, only natural in a district which had only recently come under proper administration. Though the fears of the Assyrians were genuinely held, and were such as could only be expected from people who knew very little of the country in which they were living, they were not really well founded. The ordinary Kurdish landlord wanted good tenants and as a rule the Assyrians were much better cultivators than the Kurds. In actual fact the Assyrians were living under exactly the same conditions, as the great majority of Kurds and Arabs, who throughout Iraq seldom possessed any rights in the land. Legally, the landlord had full right to evict any tenant at will, but in practice the administrative authorities stepped in and did not allow eviction of tenants except with very good reason indeed - a fact, incidentally, which was a

distinct grievance with some landlords in Southern Iraq who wanted to get rid of unsatisfactory tenants. The custom obtaining all over Iraq was explained fully in June 1933 to the Assyrian Advisory Settlement Board, mention of which will be made later. The members of this Board had inquired as to security of tenure in privately owned villages. The Government Committee at Mosul replied as follows:

> "Disputes between landlord and tenants shall be settled according to the method adopted throughout Iraq. The Administrative Authority agrees to the expulsion of a cultivator only when the cultivator has refused to pay the landlord's share of the crop, or has infringed the laws or has caused a breach of peace. If the cultivator does not cultivate a portion of his lands for the purpose of using it for grazing ground, he must pay its equivalent rental to the landlord".

The last paragraph was inserted to safeguard the landlord, who in Iraq receives a proportion of the actual crop, and not a fixed rent. He would obviously suffer if no crop was grown.

The leases between landlord and Assyrian tenant had been drawn up by Captain Fowraker and there were very few complaints about them. Indeed, when the period of the lease terminated, the Assyrians very often did not take the trouble to renew them, but went on cultivating on the same terms as before, without any written lease at all.

Another grievance of the Assyrians was the unhealthiness of their villages. Certainly the death rate among the children was very high indeed, as it is all over Iraq, where modern ideas as to the upbringing of children do not obtain. Some of the Assyrian villages, however, were undoubtedly extremely unhealthy; but all over the mountain valleys there is a great deal of malaria - a traveller in Kurdistan before the war remarked on the great mortality from this disease. It was, however, by no means certain that the Assyrian villages were, as a rule, more unhealthy than those of the Kurds. The conditions of both were, in any case, infinitely better than those of the Arabs in the marshes in Southern Iraq. Perhaps the Kurds and Arabs were more acclimatized than were the Assyrians, but the eagerness of the latter to grow rice did not improve matters. Rice is, admittedly, the most paying crop that can be grown in the mountains, but rice-growing is inseparable from malaria. Apart from this the Assyrians, because

they refused to consider themselves permanently settled, seldom carried out any drainage works such as might do away with breeding places for mosquitoes.

The following extract from a report, written by Dr. Macleod, the British Civil Surgeon in Mosul, on September 21, 1930, is worth quoting.

I would sum up the situation as follows:

1. The health of the Assyrians is the same as that of the other inhabitants of the mountains. Some are in healthy areas, and others are in unhealthy localities.
2. To say that the Assyrians are dying by hundreds is a great exaggeration.
3. There are nine Civil Dispensaries in the Qodhas of Mosul Liwa, five of these are in Assyrian Settlement areas and all are doing good work. Practically all the settlements are within 15 miles of a Government Dispensary.
4. The infantile mortality is no heavier than that of similar communities in the mountains of the Liwa. It is proportional to the incidence of malaria.
5. The incidence of malaria is often high in the mountainous districts, but it falls on Moslem and Christian alike.
6. Practically the entire Civil Medical personnel of the Mosul Liwa are Christians. It is a mistake to say that there is any discrimination whatever between Christians and Moslems in providing medical facilities.
7. Under present conditions in Iraq it is impossible to obtain reliable vital statistics from the small towns and villages in any part of the country. However it is the duty of local Mudirs to keep the Administration informed of any unusual sickness or deaths in their areas if a Health Service official is not present.

It was quite true that medical services throughout Iraq were - and still are - quite inadequate, but the national revenue is small, and much of it is devoted to such unproductive objects as the Army. In the south there were, perhaps, more medical

facilities than in the north, and in the north the language question made things still more difficult, as hardly any of the doctors spoke any language but Arabic. This, however, affected the Kurds just as much as it did the Assyrians.

Some mention must be made of the assistance given to the settlers by the Iraqi Government in the shape of remissions of taxation. In October 1926 the High Commissioner, Sir Henry Dobbs, expressed the view that one of the conditions of the success of any scheme of Assyrian settlement was that for a period of, say, five years from the date of settlement in any village, no revenue should be collected either from the crops or flocks of the Assyrians there. The Ministry of Finance, however, politely but firmly declined to accept this recommendation. It pointed out that a special law was required for such a measure, and that there were serious objections to the passing of such a law (what these objections were was not stated). The Ministry expressed its willingness to recommend remissions of taxation in specific cases, as put forward by the local authorities. As a result of some correspondence the Council of Ministers on March 8, 1927 passed the following resolution:

> *That these refugees should be informed that the Government was prepared to grant special exemption to every individual who would develop and till lands and comply with the advice and orders of the government in accordance with the law.*

It must be remarked that throughout the whole period the Ministry of the Interior took a far more sympathetic view regarding the remissions of taxation than did the Ministry of Finance, but Ministries of Finance are everywhere conservative, though often politically unsound in dealing with questions of revenue remissions, while in Iraq, British advice was as a rule more readily accepted in the Ministry of Interior than it was in the Ministry of Finance.

In all, the revenue remissions amounted to Rs. 52,669 (approximately £4,000), not a very large sum and very small compared with the remissions of taxation which had, in the same period, been made to Arab cultivators in the south.

The agricultural Assyrians, however, were not the only problem. Since 1915, when the mountaineers were driven out of Hakkiari, a new generation had grown up,

which knew little of the hard life of the tiller of the soil. Many of them now wear European dress and hats, and do not in the least resemble the farm labourer. It is a commonplace of history that once a people have left the land it is hard to get them back to it. Some, of course, did return, but not all of these were contented. They had forgotten how hard a life was that of their fathers before the war, and expected everything to be easy and perfect. Some Assyrians obtained work in the towns - men of the Baz tribe, for instance, were excellent masons and found ready employment in Baghdad, where extensive building was taking place. Others became small shopkeepers. Most of these flourished, as the Assyrians are a hard-working people, and, unlike the Arab, extremely thrifty, but others could obtain no employment. This was partly their own fault, as they had never learned Arabic - even in 1933 the proportion of Assyrians who could speak that language was very small. Nevertheless, some jobs were available in the oil companies, and a number of Assyrians were so employed, rather to the disgust of Kurds and Arabs, many of whom, too, were out of employment. Other Assyrians found work in the Iraqi Railways Administration. Few, however, could obtain Government employment, the summit of the ordinary Oriental's ambition. Here again the language difficulty was an obstacle. As the Levies were gradually disbanded, a few joined the Army. In the summer of 1932 their numbers were four officers, seven N.C.O.s., and fifty-eight other ranks. Still more joined the Police. In June 1932 they numbered 422. In fact, in Mosul Liwa, they represented 25 percent of the total Police force. Promotion, however, was difficult to obtain, especially in the Army. Examinations had to be passed, and it was, no doubt, extremely galling for an Assyrian officer with much experience in the field to fail in a written test. From 1930 onwards a few of the best educated Assyrians began to join the Iraqi Civil Service, but by 1933 there were still only fifteen employed, most of them in very junior posts.

The British Advisory officials continually recommended that the Iraqi Government should employ more Assyrians of the "Malik" (Chief) class. With a little effort posts could certainly have been found in the north, and these people could have done very useful work. It was unfortunate that red tape, suspicion, and a general dislike of Assyrians stood in the way, as nothing could have been more successful in inducing the Assyrians to accept their lot.

As it was, the majority of Assyrians still chose to consider themselves refugees. Even those settled under the most favourable conditions for instance, the Tukhuma in the group of Government villages near Basirian, a few miles from Dohuk, refused to consider themselves as permanently settled. Indeed, they were the first to depart to Syria with Yacu s ill-fated expedition of July 1933. The Permanent Mandated Commission of the League of Nations in 1932 appears to have been led to suppose that the finding of land for a comparatively few Assyrian families would finally settle the Assyrian question. Unfortunately, the problem was by no means so simple as this.

The Iraqi Government has been much criticized for its failure to effect a more satisfactory settlement of the Assyrians in Iraq. Critics have forgotten the difficulties which had to be overcome. The newly established Iraqi State was suffering from its inevitable growing-pains. The Iraqi Ministers during the years of the Mandate had many, and to them far more important problems to deal with. They naturally, and from their point of view, rightly desired an early termination of the Mandate. It was not surprising that at times they became impatient or that they found the Assyrians an irksome burden, especially as the Assyrians themselves showed few signs of settling down among or of assimilating themselves with the other peoples who go to make up modern Iraq. On the whole the Iraqis deserve considerable credit for what they achieved, and if the settlements were not perfect, this was by no means entirely their fault.

CHAPTER V: THE ASSYRIAN LEVIES

The Assyrian Levies were a most noteworthy feature of Iraq, and especially of Northern Iraq during the years of the Mandate, and no account of the Assyrians, nor indeed of Iraq itself, would be complete without some account of them.

Every visitor to Baghdad has remarked on the extremely smart appearance of the guards at the houses of the High Commissioner and the Air Officer Commanding. The general appearance of these troops, with their slouch hats and red or white hackles, was favourably commented upon by all who saw them, and their officers from time to time have said that they were as good as any troops in Asia, not excluding the Sikhs and Gurkhas.

The original Levies were not Assyrians at all. No doubt many will be surprised to learn that it was not until 1928 that the Levies became entirely Assyrian. The force subsequently known as the Levies, originated in Muntafiq Horse, a body of Arabs from the Muntafiq province on the lower Euphrates, forty in number, who were enlisted by Major Eadie in 1915. The force expanded rapidly and became known as "Shabanas", a Turkish word meaning a semi-military gendarmerie. As they became more disciplined they rendered excellent service, and during the Arab rebellion of 1920 they displayed, under conditions of the greatest trial, steadfast loyalty to their British officers. At this time practically all the "Shabanas" were Arabs, with a few Kurds in the north.

In 1919 two battalions of Assyrians were formed out of the refugees in Baquba camp. They were, however, quite distinct from the "Shabanas". They were employed in the north and did good work in operations against the Kurds near Amadiyah. They were, however, disbanded in 1920 to allow them to take part in Agha Petros's enterprise. In 1920 the Assyrians, as has already been related, had given proof of their fighting qualities, when the camps at Mindan and Baquba were attacked by the Arab rebels. During this rebellion much of the country was to all intents and purposes out of control. There were a few isolated places where British officers held out, and in several instances these officers were murdered by the rebel Arabs. It would not have been surprising, therefore, if the Assyrian protégés of the British had not been similarly dealt with. But in their camps they held out against all attacks - Arabs at Baquba and of

Kurds at Mindan - and General Haldane's testimony to the value of their services has already been quoted.

In the year following the rebellion the Cairo Conference was held. This Conference was held in order to decide what Britain was to do with her Arab conquests. Mr. Winston Churchill, who was, at that time, Secretary of State for the Colonies, presided, and there were present all the experts from the old Arab Bureau who had functioned during the war in Cairo and who had been largely instrumental in bringing the Sharifian forces under the Emir Feisal. Of the many decisions taken at this Conference perhaps the most important was that the Emir Feisal, who in the previous year had been ejected from Damascus by the French, should be recommended to the people of Mesopotamia, or Iraq as it was to be called, as their King. It was also decided, that in the interests of economy the British and Indian troops in Mesopotamia should be replaced by local Levies. These were to comprise Arabs, Kurds, and Assyrians and were to be Imperial troops, maintained and paid by the British Treasury. It was, however, not desired that the enlistment of Arabs in the Levies should be continued for long, as otherwise there would be competition with the Iraqi Army which was shortly to be formed.

So in April 1921 came the first attempt to enlist Assyrians, and they were far from successful. The Assyrians said that all they wanted was that the British should arrange for them to return to their own homes. Within two or three months, however, two hundred had joined, largely through the persuasive eloquence of Dr. Wigram, who, having for some years before the war served in the Hakkiari Mountains with the Archbishop of Canterbury's Mission, was well known to them. The Command was given to Brigadier-General Sadleir Jackson, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O. More Assyrians joined later, and the Assyrian Levies as such had their baptism of fire in December 1921 in the operations near Batas and Harir near Rowanduz, which was at that time in the occupation of the Turks. There was not much actual fighting, but the cheerful manner in which the Assyrians underwent extremely trying climatic conditions earned the wholehearted praise of their British officers.

In 1922 it was decided to recruit 1,500 more Assyrians. The experiment of having mixed companies of Kurds and Assyrians had been tried and had failed. The

Chaldeans and the Yezidis (Devil-worshippers) had proved unsuitable as soldiers. This number was duly enlisted, but the recruits suffered much from the same troubles as did our own New Army in the early days of the war, nor did they endure their troubles so patiently. At the beginning equipment, clothing, and even tents were lacking, and at Dohuk, where they were concentrated, there was much malaria, and most of them went down with fever. There were grumbles at cuts in their pay, for they had been enlisted with the promise of a monthly pay of Rs. 50, and when a 10 percent cut was made from this and they only received Rs. 45 they refused to re-engage when their first year was up. This, as will be seen, was an important factor in the future development of things. Those who refused to re-engage were later persuaded to do so by David, (he had received the O.B.E. for distinguished service during the Batas operations the year before), the father of the Mar Shimun, who later on became Chief Liaison Officer of the Levies. The importance of this is that members of the family of the Mar Shimun thus came to exercise very great authority over the Levies. For a considerable period they controlled enlistments and promotions, and at the present time those Assyrian Levies who remain in the service are the most enthusiastic supporters of the Mar Shimun. Conversely, the influence of the Mar Shimun's family among the Levies has greatly strengthened his own authority among the Assyrians as a whole. It was very convenient for the British authorities when any question arose to deal with the Levies through the Mar Shimun. This was notably the case when the political mutiny of 1932 occurred and, as will be seen later, it had much to do with the Mar Shimun's claim that what he called his temporal power should be recognized.

By October 1922 the Assyrian units in the Levies consisted of two battalions of infantry, one pack battery, and two squadrons of cavalry. During the year they had been employed in operations at Rania, near Suleimaniyah, and at Amadiyah. In Amadiyah town there was a sudden Kurdish rising, inspired partly by Turkish propaganda and partly by a dislike on the part of the Kurdish Aghas of being brought under control, which had nearly resulted in the capture of the Qaimaqam. He was only saved by the prompt arrival of Bishop Sirkis, who, as soon as he heard what was happening, hastily collected two hundred Assyrians and sailed into the fray - another proof that an Assyrian Bishop is as much at home with the rifle as with the pastoral staff.

(Another Bishop, Yusef, uncle of the Mar Shimun, was once invited to take part in a sweep at a R.A.F. rifle meeting. He did so and finished seventh out of 150 firers!). Two unfortunate incidents were soon to occur. In August 1923 there was a fracas in the Bazaar at Mosul which nearly caused a serious outbreak. Two Assyrian children were found killed and their murderers were never discovered. The Assyrian Levies, whose headquarters were in Mosul, in their indignation nearly got out of hand. The people at Mosul are always difficult, and there had always been feeling between the Moslems and the Christians in the town. This feeling became more bitter as the result of this incident, and it was most unfortunately followed in May 1924 by a serious affair at Kirkuk, where the 2nd Battalion of Assyrians was stationed and where there was an actual outbreak. As in Mosul, relations between the Assyrians and the townspeople of Kirkuk, mainly of Turkoman origin, were the reverse of friendly. A second battalion was under orders to proceed to Suleimaniyah to join the Iraqi Army in operations against Sheikh Mahmud, the Kurdish National leader, who was engaged in one of his periodic revolts against the Iraqi Government. It was alleged that the townspeople taunted the Levy soldiers with what would happen to their wives and families when they left for the front. Tension ran high and a brawl in a coffee shop caused a riot. The news was carried back to the barracks that an Assyrian soldier had been killed, and this news set the match to the powder barrel. The Assyrians seized their rifles and ran amok throughout the Bazaars of the town, firing on everyone they saw. To start with, their own British officers were unable to check them and for some little time they were out of control, and it was only with some difficulty that their officers were able to reassert their authority. Fifty of the townspeople were killed in this affair, among them a much revered religious Sheikh. Four Assyrian soldiers lost their lives. No doubt the provocation was considerable, but, as has been stated in an earlier chapter, whatever the provocation may have been, such an outbreak on the part of disciplined troops was a serious blot on the good name of the Assyrians. Most serious was the effect it had in widening the gulf between the Assyrians and the Iraqis, who by 1933 seemed to be fully persuaded that the Assyrians were invincible - a psychological factor which will be appreciated in a later chapter. When a court-martial at Kirkuk was held only nine Levy soldiers were found guilty. This, too, caused considerable comment in the Iraqi Press, unaccustomed as it was to the

justice of a British court-martial. They were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment, but the Iraqi Government displayed a very creditable sense of moderation and only a portion of the sentences was actually served.

In the summer of 1924 the Assyrian Levies were again engaged in operations against Sheikh Mahmud. (Actually the Assyrian Levies were engaged in almost continuous operations against Sheikh Mahmud from the summer of 1924 until May 1927. It has always been somewhat of a grievance among them that few of them were awarded the General Service Medal, which the R.A.F. personnel obtained for shorter periods of service). At that time the Iraqi Army was only three years old. Unlike the Assyrians, who had the benefit of the direct command of British officers with experience in dealing with such troops, the Iraqi Army was under the disadvantage of being officered by Arabs, with British officers only in advisory capacities, and these Arabs were either ex-Turkish officers who, however experienced, had found no little difficulty in turning over to British ideas, or young officers whose military schooling was just beginning. The Arab troops too were untried; most of them were plainsmen or men from the deserts and towns. They were entirely out of their element when taken up into Kurdish hills, where conditions of warfare are much the same as on the northwest frontier of India. The terrain is entirely in favour of the defenders. Sheikh Mahmud's men were not only well armed, but they knew every inch of the country. The Iraqi forces were moving through a semi-hostile countryside, and there is no doubt that the Arab troops would have found themselves in serious difficulties if they had not had Levy support. This was true as late as 1932, when the rebellious Sheikh Ahmed of Barzan could never have been reduced by the Iraqis without the help of the British Royal Air Force. The Assyrians, too, sent their 3rd battalion later in 1924 to the Amadiyah district. As already related, the Turks had evicted the Assyrian settlers from the Hakkiari mountains and had pursued them into Iraqi territory. Here they were repulsed, largely by the Assyrian irregulars who had been hastily collected. The regular Assyrian troops on this occasion displayed the finest discipline under the most trying circumstances. Their families were imperilled from the advancing Turks, but the Levies remained firm. They behaved just as well, as will be described later, under even more trying conditions in August 1933.

Another attempt to employ Assyrian irregulars the next year ended in failure, as the following account shows. The costumes of the men recruited at Mosul indicated how irregular they were. Some of them were dressed in their picturesque native Assyrian clothes, and thence by various stages to European dress complete with grey bowler hat. They were only raised at all by an increase of a promise of pay. They had no idea of discipline on the march or in action. During the action at Kinaru, on June 25th, every man fought for himself bravely enough, but with entire disregard for the rest of the force. When placed on picket near Penjvin, most of them left the picket line and descended to the village to loot. Only on independent patrols did they do really good work, and here they nearly obeyed orders. On this the Colonel Commandant of the force interviewed them and sixty-nine of them agreed to obey orders. These were formed into a mounted body called locally "The 69th Light Horse". The rest were sent back to Mosul and discharged. It was at this time that the Assyrians suffered their heaviest casualties in action, but these casualties were very slight and must appear trivial as compared with the holocausts reported almost daily during the Great War. And in fact the Assyrians were never tested in the face of heavy losses. This is a point which has sometimes been lost sight of. The Assyrians were at home in the mountains, and they were the equals of the Kurds in the guerrilla warfare on their own grounds. Under these conditions they were infinitely superior to the Arabs of the plains, but it was never put to the test whether their fighting value outside their own terrain (when after the mutiny of 1932 a few of the Assyrian Levies were moved down to Basrah, they were distinctly unhappy in the steamy autumn on the Shatt-al-Arab) would have been greater than that of the Arabs had these two been commanded, by British officers. In the type of warfare, however, in which the Assyrians were engaged and to which they were accustomed, heavy casualties were not likely to occur and they certainly did all that was asked of them. They were enthusiastically praised by their British officers, who, as is the way with British officers all over the world, fostered as much as possible their esprit de corps. Perhaps, however, there was too much belittlement of the young Iraqi Army, which was in the process of formation, and which, as already stated, in its first operations in the mountains was by no means successful. This comment will probably be criticized in certain quarters, but it can hardly be disputed that some of the junior

British officers in the Levies were rather prejudiced against the Arab Government. In any case feelings of intense jealously sprang up between the Assyrian Levies and the Iraqi Army, and these feelings increased the mutual dislike of Assyrian and Arab. The Assyrians took their cue from their officers - indeed, from the very fact of their service with the British - in despising the Arabs. The Arabs felt that a subject race was being used as an instrument against them by the Mandatory Power, whose intentions they never imagined were honest. Neither Assyrian nor Arab in those early days of the Mandate thought for one minute that within ten years British control would be gone and the country independent, and the Assyrians□unpopularity from 1932 onwards is largely the result of their service with the British. The services for the British commended them to the whole of the British community, to their own officers, and to the members of the Royal Air Force stationed from time to time in the country. Their appearance, as has been said, was smart and they were, moreover, cheerful under the worst weather conditions, and, as is the way of mountaineers, they could endure extreme hardship. Unlike many native troops they could, and did, produce officers who were fit to command. Those Assyrians who rose to commissioned rank were all men of initiative and efficiency. They had taken readily to British tactical ideas, and, unlike many Eastern peoples, they were not only willing but able to accept responsibilities.

From 1926 onwards the Levies began to be reduced in strength. Those that took their discharge were given a rifle and two hundred rounds of ammunition, the object being that they should be able to protect themselves in their villages. The Arabs have strenuously criticized this on the grounds that it was a British device to establish a pro-British armed enclave in the north of Iraq. When the troubles came in 1932-3 the Arabs still believed that the British were using the Assyrians against the interests of the independent Arab Government in Baghdad, and were both surprised and relieved when they made the discovery that it was British policy to support the Iraqi Government and not the Assyrians. So far as concerned the rifle and two hundred rounds of ammunition, the issue of these was fully justified. Practically every Kurd in the country is armed, and it was only right that every Assyrian should have a rifle as well. It would have been impossible to have sent the Assyrians home to their villages unarmed, for that would have put them at the mercy of the Kurds. Equally impossible was the only alternative,

namely the disarmament of the Kurds - even yet the Iraqi Government is not nearly strong enough to effect this.

Some of the discharged Levies joined the Iraqi Police, where they did well, and a few the Army, where not through any fault of their own, they proved less satisfactory. Altogether approximately four thousand Assyrians passed through the Levies. The greatest number serving at any time was about two thousand five hundred. By June 1932 their numbers had been reduced to one thousand five hundred, and a year later to eight hundred, and they were employed solely to guard the British R.A.F. aerodromes as provided in the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1931. There had been no active service since 1927, though they had assisted the Iraqi Army in garrisoning various stations, notably Billeh, just at the foot of the Barzan country. Negotiations are now in progress with a view to changing the name of the Levies to that of Air Defence Guards, for which force Arabs and Kurds are also being recruited.

An account of the Levy mutiny of June 1932, which mutiny was essentially political rather than military, will be given in another chapter.

It is easy to be wise after the event, but looking back one may doubt the wisdom of enlisting the Assyrians into the Levies. It is true that in 1921 this was the obvious thing to do. They were clearly good fighting material. They were still unsettled and their levy pay would be a godsend to them. It was still hoped that they would be able to return to their Hakkiari homes where they would enjoy some kind of self-government. But this was not to be. By the end of 1925 it was certain that they had no apparent future except as Iraqi citizens. Therefore, the sooner they could be assimilated in the Iraqi State the better, but being employed as they were as Imperial troops under an unpopular Mandatory Power they seemed definitely alien to the rest of Iraq. Ever since the formation of the Iraqi State the Iraqi politician has been terrified of the minority question, which might postpone the obtaining of the longed for independence. And here there was a minority, if ever there was one. Financially, of course, the Assyrians profited very greatly from their levy service, while the British taxpayer also benefited, since by the employment of Assyrians rather than British or Indian troops in Iraq very considerable economies were effected. Nevertheless, it is doubtful whether in the long run the Assyrians have gained. It can hardly be disputed that Great Britain by

employing them as Levies has undertaken a real obligation on their behalf. It might have been expected that the Iraqi Government should be grateful to the Assyrian Levies for their service in the early days, for though the claims of the Assyrians that it was only owing to them that Kurdistan was brought under control are farfetched - they forget that large numbers of British and Indian troops were also employed up to 1923 - they certainly accomplished much good work, unfortunately, however, political reasons forbid any display of gratitude.

CHAPTER VI: THE ASSYRIANS AND THE LEAGUE

The British Government has been freely accused of having broken its faith with the Assyrians. The great services rendered by the British during the early days are generally admitted with gratitude, but the charge is made that Britain ought to have returned the Assyrians to Hakkiari, and that her failure to do so constituted a breach of faith. In certain quarters, even in England, doubts are expressed openly and strongly as to whether all has been done for the Assyrians that could have been done. In order that the true facts of the case may be known, it is necessary to quote certain official reports and documents. Only by such means will it be possible to understand the process by which the Hakkiari mountaineers found themselves when the British mandate over Iraq terminated, with no apparent future except as Iraqi citizens.

Before the war the Turkish idea of the "millet" - that is to say the basing of nationality upon religion - was the normal policy followed in most parts of the Ottoman dominions, European and Asiatic. Before the war the Assyrians' sentiment was tribal rather than national, but during their stay in the camp in Baquba, having come into contact with Western men and Western methods and hearing free discussions all around them of the new ideas of self-determination which were the logical outcome of President Wilson's Fourteen Points, it was not long before something like a national consciousness began to develop in them.

At the commencement of 1919 the league of Nations had not come into existence, but at Versailles were gathered the representatives of many small would-be-nations. Arabs, Armenians, and Kurds were there from the Middle East. Of these only the Arabs were able to achieve their ambition, and they only a part of it.

The Assyrians, too, desired to send a representative to state their case. At first their request was refused for political reasons. The Mar Shimun, Paulos, was duly informed of this by the Civil Commissioner in Baghdad. He thereupon wrote a long letter which, in that it explains the ambitions of the Assyrian people at that time, is worth quoting in full:

To his Honour, Colonel A. T. Wilson, Civil Commissioner and Chief Political

Officer in Baghdad, Greetings from Paulos Mar Shimun, by Divine Permission patriarch of the Church of the East Syrians.

As head of the Assyrian Millet, I do not wish to deny that I am disappointed at the decision of the British Government that it is not advisable to send a representative of this nationality to the Peace Conference at Paris; if that Government could see its way to reconsider that decision in the light of the fact that Armenians, Kurds, and Arabs have been allowed someone to plead their cause, it would be a great joy to us all.

If your Honour is clear that it would not be advisable, we accept your decision loyally, but we make two requests to you:

1. *There is, as you are aware, a discontented faction in the Assyrian Millet. When your honour informed me that it had been decided not to allow an Assyrian representative to go to Paris, the leaders of the faction urged me to send one in secret, in defiance of your prohibition. I refused to do this, and their men are using my conduct as a means of stirring up discontent against me, saying that Mar Shimun does not care for the Millet but only for his own house. My request then is, will you write me a letter, such as I can show to my people, saying that I did make a request that a representative of the nation should be sent to Paris, and that the British Government felt obliged to refuse the request for political reasons?*
2. *My second request is this. Will you allow me to send a telegram to the Archbishop of Canterbury, asking him to secure that these wishes of our nation be put before the Conference in Paris?*

I) *That in any arrangement made, we Assyrians may not be confounded with the Armenians.*

II) *That all Assyrians may remain permanently under British protection in their own country.*

III) *We should ask also (but in this case we make our request of the British Government, not of the Conference, in that we like to be under that Government's jurisdiction) that the position of the Mar Shimun as head*

of the Millet may be recognized by the Government.

We explain points (I I) and (III) further for your information:

(I I) The country inhabited from of old by Syrians and Assyrians extends as far north in Kurdistan as the line from Bashkala to Bitlis, and as far west as Jezirat Ibn Omar.

To the north of this line the Christians are generally Armenian, and to the west of it of the "West Syrian" or "Jacobites" communion. Naturally a few scattered villages of each communion are formed behind the line in each case, but provision could be made for these, if necessary. It is our prayer that the British Jurisdiction be extended, to the limits named, for it is under them and no other that we desire to dwell.

We pray, too, that in the light of recent events the districts of Urmi, Solduz, and Salmas in the western side of Lake Urmie, be included in this protectorate, if possible, though we recognize that there are special difficulties here.

(I I I) Owing to the primitive state of our people, we beg that the whole Patriarchal form of government over their various tribes be continued under British superintendence and advice. This simple government is what the people are accustomed to, and it has been found to work best in the past.

If the British Protectorate be proclaimed, then the safety of our people is assured, and we have not the least wish to interfere with the rights of the Kurdish inhabitants of the land. They are, like us, dwellers there from of old, and we believe that if once a Government were

established that would stop raiding on both sides, the two nations could live in friendship.

If these three desires of ours can be secured to us, then all comparatively small matters, such as the release of captives, the restoration of Church endowments to their ancient use, and the drawing up of the boundaries

between Christian and Kurdish villages, can of course be settled by the British Political officers in Kurdistan.

In closing this letter, I must express, as Patriarch of this ancient Millet, my deep gratitude to the British Government for all that it has done to preserve my people during their terrible years of affliction.

In March a telegram was dispatched by the Civil Commissioner to the India Office, asking if a delegate of the Assyrian community might proceed to Paris to put forward the case of the Assyrian nation. In April a reply was received that the British Government considered that no purpose would be served by such a deputation, and that the Assyrians should be told as sympathetically as possible that the British Government would so their best to ensure that the special position of the Assyrians would be safeguarded.

In May the Civil Commissioner telegraphed again, and on July 21st the India Office replied that one Assyrian could come to London, "When on arrival the question of a visit to Paris could be considered". Surma Khanum was then appointed to be representative of the Assyrians, and in September left Iraq for London, where she arrived a month later. Here she was very well received (In a book entitled "The Flickering Light of Asia", written by an Assyrian and published in America, it was stated that she was received "like a princess"), and had interviews with Lord Curzon and most of the prominent figures of the time. She did not, however, go to Versailles, as the Conference had already decided that it was necessary to receive a separate Assyrian delegate.

During the summer the Assyrian demands were amplified on the following points. They asked:

1. To obtain future security under the protection of the British Government as a united nation in the area Mosul-Jezirah-Bashkala-Urmiyah.
2. That the Persian Government should be required to guarantee the security of Assyrians who were formerly Persian subjects, and to ensure their resettlement in the districts around Urmiyah. For this purpose a British Consul and the maintenance of a special Gendarmerie, commanded by British officers, was desired at Urmiyah.
3. That the Persian Government be called upon to effect the release of all Christians at present held captive by Persians and Kurds in Persian territory.
4. To obtain restitution of private and ecclesiastical lands and buildings, forcibly taken from the Assyrians by the Turks and Kurds (particularly the latter) during the past fifty years.
5. That the ecclesiastical laws of the nation be recognized by the protecting nation.
6. That the former grazing grounds, from which the mountain Assyrians had been driven by Moslem oppression, should again be made available for their flocks and herds.
7. The punishment of certain Kurd and Persian chieftains who had systematically during the past few years oppressed and ill-treated Christians, and to ensure that this tyranny shall cease.

It was, of course, clear that there was no likelihood whatever of these demands being obtained in full. The area claimed was one in which the Kurds were in a considerable majority, and in 1919 there were hopes that the Kurds, too, might become a nation. Leaving aside Turkey, which then appeared to be incapable of resistance, some of the area belonged to Persia, a neutral Power. It is true that it is just possible that some frontier adjustments further south might have induced the Persian Government to give up some of the country around Urmiyah, but such adjustments would naturally be at the expense of the Arab Kingdom, which it was hoped would soon

be established in Baghdad. For in the course of the war lavish promises had been made to the Arabs, promises which it later proved impossible to carry out in their entirety.

The British Government was, in any case, handicapped in its attempts to settle the Assyrians as a nation anywhere north by the existence of the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1915, which was approved as a working arrangement by Sir Edward Grey, Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and M. Cambon, the French Ambassador in London, in May 1916. Under this agreement five zones were created in the southern part of Asiatic Turkey:

1. A "brown" zone comprising Palestine with Jerusalem and Jaffa, where an international administration was to be established.
2. A British zone, Basra, Baghdad, Khaniqin, where Great Britain was free to establish such administration or control as she might consider suitable.
3. A French zone comprising the Syrian Coast (Beirut, Antioch, Alexandretta), Cilicia (Mersina, Adana), and the country between Cilicia and the Upper Tigris (Marash, Aintab, Urfa, Diarbekr). Here France disposed of the same rights as England under paragraph 2.

4 & 5. On the intermediate stretch of land, between the British and the French zones, the two Governments were ready to recognize and protect an independent Arab State or a confederation of Arab States. The territory was divided into two "spheres of influence" in which England and France respectively had a priority of loans and enterprises and could furnish the staff of foreign councillors and employees. The French sphere of influence (A) comprised Damascus, Aleppo, and Mosul, and on the east joined the Persian frontier. The British sphere (B) occupied the Syrian desert, Tekrit, and the territory along the Persian frontier between the zone (A) and Khaniqin (1 and 2).

In this way it is clear that the Mosul territory was detached from Iraq proper and

given to France. It appears that the object was to separate the conflicting interests of Great Britain (in the south) and Russia (in the north) and thereby diminish the possibility of future friction between them. Russia at first did not favour the appearance in the immediate neighbourhood of her future frontiers of a new political factor represented by France, but finally, in April 1916, she agreed to the project elaborated by M. Picot and Sir Mark Sykes, on the condition that the region of Kurdistan situated south of Van and Bitlis should be included in Russia. Its limits were defined as follows: "The region between Mush Sart, the Tigris, Jezirat Ibn Omar, and the line of peaks commanding over Amadiyah and Mergawar".

The Russian Revolution in 1917, of course, changed the whole situation, but it was only gradually that the final delimitation of the areas to come under the British and French Mandates was decided. M. Clemenceau accepted, in principle, Mr. Lloyd George's plan of leaving Mosul out of the French zone in exchange for a promise to allow a 25 percent participation in the Mesopotamian oil, and this arrangement was officially approved at the San Remo Agreement of April 25, 1920. There were other difficulties in the north. The terms of the Armistice with Turkey fixed the provisional frontier between the British and the Turks as the line to which the British had advanced, with a proviso in Articles 7 and 16 of the Armistice, which enabled the British to occupy the points of strategic importance, and which mentioned the surrender of the Turkish garrisons in Mesopotamia. Under this proviso the British troops occupied Mosul, which they had not reached before the Armistice, despite strong objections on the part of the Turks, but much of the Mosul Vilayet still remained for the time being in the hands of the Turks.

It should be noted that during the war the Allies had declared officially that they intended to create an Arab State in Mesopotamia, and that the British armies had not come as conquerors but as liberators. It was not until the end of 1918 that there was any thought of a similar Kurdish State further north. The first official indication of approval of the policy of self-determination for the various peoples, who had lived in the old Turkish Empire, appeared in the Anglo-French Agreement of November 1918. Naturally, the Assyrians could claim to be one of these peoples.

The Treaty of Sevres, which was signed on August 10, 1920, between the Allies

and the Turks, but which never came into effect, allowed for the independence of all these peoples. The most important of these were the Arabs, the Armenians, and the Kurds. The least important were the Assyrians, and they were not accorded autonomy. In fact, the only mention of the Assyrians appeared in Article 62 of the treaty, which read as follows:

> *A commission sitting at Constantinople and composed of those members appointed by the British, French, and Italian Governments respectively, shall draft with six months from the coming into force of the present Treaty a scheme of local autonomy for the predominately Kurdish areas lying east of the Euphrates, south of the southern boundary of Armenia as it may be hereafter determined, and north of the frontier of Turkey with Syria and Mesopotamia, as defined in Article 27 (I I, 2 and 3). If unanimity cannot be secured on any question, it will be referred by the members of the Commission to their respective Governments.*
>
> *The scheme shall contain full safe-guards for the protection of the Assyro-Chaldean and other racial and religious minorities within those areas, and with this object a Commission composed of British, French, Italian, and Turkish representatives shall visit the spot to examine what rectification, if any, should be made in the Turkish frontier, where under the provisions of the present Treaty, that frontier coincides with that of Persia.*

The resurgence of Turkey, however, following the National Pact of Angora, under the leadership of Mustapha Kemel, rendered the Sevres Treaty a dead letter. In any case it must be said that even had this not happened, whoever had to solve the frontier difficulties between the various young nations would have been faced with a pretty problem.

In the meantime (1921) the Arab State of Iraq had been established with Feisal as King. The frontiers between it and Turkey, however, remained undetermined. The Turks, indeed, claimed the whole of the Vilayet of Mosul. It is unnecessary here to go into the provisions of the Treaty of Lausanne, which was signed early in 1923. It is sufficient to say that its conditions were very different to those of the Sevres Treaty, since Turkey in 1923 was very different to the Turkey of 1920. While the Turks did not

seek to recover the Arab speaking areas of their former Empire, all hopes of an independent Armenia or Kurdistan were clearly at an end. The question of the northern frontier of Iraq, too, remained unsettled. The final text of the Lausanne Treaty (Article 3) read as follows:

> *The frontier between Turkey and Iraq shall be laid down in friendly arrangement to be concluded between Turkey and Great Britain within nine months.*
>
> *In the event of no agreement being reached between the two Governments within the time mentioned, the dispute shall be referred to the Council of the League of Nations.*
>
> *The Turkish and British Governments reciprocally under take that, pending the decision to be reached on the subject of the frontier, no military or other movement shall take place which might modify in any way the present state of the territories of which the final fate will depend upon the decision.*

The wording of this article was by no means clear and very nearly led to armed conflict between Great Britain and Turkey.

At the conferences preceding the signing of the Lausanne Treaty hardly any mention was made of the Assyrians, though Lord Curzon in one Memorandum did state that it was impossible to expect the Assyrians to accept the return of the Turkish rule to Hakkiari. For by this time, as had been mentioned in an earlier chapter, a considerable number of the Assyrian mountaineers had returned to their former homes.

At the Conference of Constantinople, which, in accordance with the Provisions of Article 3 of the Treaty of Lausanne, was held in May 1924, the question of the Assyrians came to the fore for the first time, since by now more accurate topographical data had been obtained, while interested persons in England had brought to the notice of the Colonial Office the gloomy prospects of the Assyrians of the Hakkiari highlands which became a part of Turkey.

Referring to this situation, the report of the Special Commission of the League of Nations states that it was at the Conference of Constantinople in May 1924 that the question was raised by the British Government as an argument for the extension of the

frontiers of Iraq.

At the beginning of April 1924 the British Government had notified the Iraqi Government of its intentions to demand the cession to Iraq of a portion of the Assyrian territory. At the same time it explained the advantages which Iraq would derive from having on its northern frontier a warlike people united to the Arab State by ties of friendship and gratitude, and asked whether the Baghdad Government would be prepared to guarantee that Assyrians who had not yet settled would be able to acquire on favourable conditions some of the abandoned land in the northern districts. The British Government further asked whether the Iraqi Government would be prepared to grant all the Assyrians the same local autonomy as they enjoyed before the war under Turkish rule.

The reply of the Iraqi Government, which was given April 30th, was in the affirmative. The new British proposal was explained at the Constantinople Conference on May 19, 1924, by Sir Percy Cox, who spoke as follows:

> *"Moreover, since the negotiations at Lausanne were broken off, one problem has gained considerably in importance in the eyes of His Majesty's Government. This problem is the future of the Assyrians other than those of Persian origin. His Majesty's Government feels under the strongest obligation to secure their settlement in accordance with the reasonable claims and aspirations of their race. They have made an earnest appeal, which His Majesty's Government cannot regard with indifference, to be established in their former homes under a British protectorate. However greatly such a solution might appeal to Christendom at large, His Majesty's Government cannot, for various reasons, contemplate so grave an extension of its responsibilities. While therefore, not prepared to respond to their aspirations in full, His Majesty's Government has decided to endeavour to secure a good treaty frontier, which will at the same time admit of the establishment of the Assyrians in a compact community within the limits of the territory in respect of which His Majesty's Government holds a Mandate under the authority of the League of Nations, if not in every case in their ancestral habitation, at all*

events in suitable adjacent districts. This policy for the settlement of the Assyrians has the full sympathy and support of the Iraqi Government, which is prepared for its part, to give the necessary co-operation for giving effect thereto.

The statement made by Sir Percy Cox is of great importance. It shows that Great Britain definitely rejected the assumption of a Protectorate over an Assyrian nation - the United States had refused the same responsibility in respect to the Armenians. All that the British Government could endeavour to assure was the establishment of a homogeneous Assyrian community, possessing special privileges, within the frontiers of a country which was likely to be under British Mandate and tutelage for a considerable period - for in 1924 it was hardly envisaged that the British Mandate over Iraq would terminate eight years later.

The Turkish representative strongly opposed the British arguments. On May 21st Fethi Beg spoke as follows:

I would like to add that the Nestorians would still find in Turkish territory the tranquility and prosperity which they enjoyed there for centuries, provided they did not repeat the errors which they committed, with foreign encouragement, at the beginning of the Great War.

To this Sir Percy Cox replied:

Fethi Beg's assertion that the Nestorians would find in Turkish territory all the tranquillity and prosperity which they had enjoyed in the past, provided that they did not renew their wartime activities, did not square with the Nestorian's own views. They had the most vivid memory - entirely at variance with Fethi Beg - of the treatment they had suffered in the past at the hands of the Turks.

The question of the whole northern frontier of Iraq was finally referred to the League of Nations, and the British Government put forward the following arguments for the inclusion of the Hakkiari highlands within the frontiers of Iraq:

In spite of their isolated position in the heart of a country under Turkish rule, the small Assyrian people, in the very early days of the Great War, determined to espouse the cause of the Allies and to seize the opportunity to break away from the rule of those whom their past history

had led them to regard as their persistent oppressors. They endured great sufferings as the result of this decision. They were driven from their own country and died in thousands in their flight to Iraq.

For the time being they succeeded in settling partly in the southern portion of their own country and partly among the Kurds and indigenous Christians of the country immediately to the south of their old habitat.

The British Government feels under the strongest obligation to secure their settlement in accordance with the reasonable claims and aspirations of their race. They have appealed for the establishment, in the whole of their ancient habitat, of a British protectorate.

The British Government has been unable for various reasons to respond to their aspirations in full, but has endeavoured to secure them a frontier which would fulfil certain conditions and is now requesting the Council of the League of Nations to establish that frontier. The latter, while fulfilling the requirements of a good treaty frontier, should at the same time admit of the establishment of the Assyrians in a compact community within the limits of the territory in respect of which the British Government holds a Mandate under the authority of the League of Nations, if not in every case in their ancestral habitations, at all events in suitable adjacent districts. To draw the line further to the south in this region would, apart from economic and strategic disadvantages, produce such a panic among the Assyrians that they would find no alternative but to resort either to mass emigration or to fight to the death in defence of their ideals. Peace and prosperity upon this section of the frontier would be impossible.

Among its geographical and strategic arguments, the memorandum in question advances a further reason in support of the proposed frontier - namely, that the warlike Assyrian people were willing to give their loyalty to Iraq on certain conditions and would constitute a valuable frontier community to the Iraq State.

The Tragedy of the Assyrians

The League of Nations appointed a special commission to examine the claims of Great Britain and Turkey. In the meantime the "Brussels Line" which in October 1924 had been selected as the temporary frontier was accepted as such by both parties.

The commission, which consisted of the following members - Count Teleki, former prime Minister of Hungary, M. de Wiren, Swedish minister in Bucharest, and Colonel Paulis, of the Belgian Army, commenced its inquiries in the early spring of 1925. On July 16th it presented its report to the League of Nations. The Commission accepted the claims of Great Britain for the inclusion of the Mosul Vilayet within Iraq - the Brussels line to be the frontier between Iraq and Turkey, but it rejected the British claim that the Hakkiari highlands should also be attached to Iraq.

As regards Hakkiari, the Commission appears to have been mainly influenced by the following arguments:

1. The question of restoring the Assyrians to their former homes north of the boundary of the Vilayet of Mosul was not raised at the Lausanne Conference. In fact, it was only raised for the first time by the British Government at the Conference of Constantinople in April 1924. (In its report the Commission published in full the statements and counter-statements made by Sir Percy Cox and Fethi Beg during this Conference).
2. The fact that the Assyrian people had, without cause or provocation early in the Great War, risen at the instigation of foreigners against their lawful Government. It was hardly fair, the Commission stated, to take from Turkey a territory which indisputable belongs to her, in order to settle a people who deliberately took up arms against its Sovereign.

The commission recommended that the most satisfactory solution would be for the Assyrians to accept the offer, made by the Turkish delegate at Constantinople, that they should be allowed to return to their former homes. In that case the Turkish Government should agree that the Assyrians should continue to enjoy the same local autonomy as formerly and that their safety must be guaranteed by a complete amnesty.

The Commission does not appear to have realized that the Assyrians who had

returned to Hakkiari in 1922 - 1923 had been expelled by the Turks in the autumn of 1924. It does not appear to have realized that there was not the least likelihood of Turkey granting the Assyrians any kind of autonomy. Even before the war the Central Turkish Government was doing everything in its power to abolish local autonomy throughout its Empire, and was gradually succeeding. If the war had not intervened, it is quite certain that Assyrians, too, would have lost what local autonomy they had enjoyed. Lastly, the Commission does not appear to have realized the weakness of the argument that the Assyrians, in that they had risen against their lawful Government, merited little consideration. For it must have forgotten that King Feisal and his chief supporters in Baghdad, without any provocation whatever, had done exactly the same thing.

The Commission, however, did realize that if the Hakkiari highlands were not allotted to the Assyrians, they could have no hope of their obtaining local autonomy in Iraq, and in its report appears the following paragraph:

> *The British authorities also informed the Commission that the future treatment of the Assyrians would depend entirely on the decision taken with regard to the frontier. If the territory occupied by the Assyrians is not assigned to Iraq, they cannot be granted any local autonomy, because in that case they would not be settled in homogeneous communities. If the frontier were drawn towards the south, thus incorporating in Iraq only a small part of the former Assyrian territory, it would be impossible to find land for the Assyrians in Iraq. The plan for settling the Assyrians depends on the acceptance of the frontier proposed by the British Government. Even if lands could be found, the Assyrians could not live in the plains owing to climatic conditions. Other difficulties would be produced by the difference of customs between the Arabs and the Assyrians, which would strain the relations between them, whereas Assyrian and Kurdish customs are much more similar.*

In replying on the promises of the Turkish delegate at Geneva that Turkey would accept the Assyrians in Hakkiari, the members of the Commission displayed an optimism and credulity which hardly seems possible. They must have known that, in

deciding as they did, they were destroying the last hopes of the Assyrians ever being able to live in a homogeneous community.

But it must be admitted that whether the arguments propounded by the Commission were sound or the reverse, and even if the Assyrian homeland had been included in Iraq, it is extremely doubtful whether the Assyrian question would have been finally settled. A semi-autonomous Assyrian enclave within Iraq must have been a serious embarrassment to the Iraqi Government, even if, as envisaged by the Commission, the British Mandate was to continue for twenty-five years. Apart from this, the existence of such a difficult people living on the borders of two other countries, Turkey and Persia, of which Turkey was to have continuous troubles with her Kurdish subjects during the next few years, sooner or later would have almost inevitably led to an impossible situation.

Great Britain, of course, had to accept the League's decision. The attempts to settle the Assyrians in Iraq have been described in an earlier chapter. The British Government, as Mandatory Power, naturally took steps to keep the League of Nations informed as to the progress of the settlement.

The league itself had for the next few years no direct contact with the Assyrians. In the autumn of 1929, however, the British Government announced officially that it had decided unconditionally to recommend to the League of Nations that the British Mandate over Iraq should be terminated in 1932. This announcement was an advance on that of 1927, when in the remodelled Anglo-Iraqi Treaty the condition of such a recommendation stipulated, "Provided the present rate of progress in Iraq is maintained and all goes well in the interval".

The immediate result of this declaration was considerable uneasiness on the part of the minorities in Iraq, and this uneasiness became alarm when on the publication of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of June 30th it was observed that no provision had been made for the protection of minorities. For the Assyrians were not the only minority, nor even the most important. In Iraq lived upwards of 500,000 Kurds (another 700,000 lived in Persia and 1,500,000 in Turkey). The treaty of Sevres had envisaged the establishment of a Kurdish republic, but when Turkey rose like a phoenix from the flames, all hopes of this were speedily dispelled. The Turks adopted their usual methods to smash the Kurdish

movement. The Persians, too, had their Kurdish troubles. So did Iraq. Of all people in the world, even taking into account the Arabs, the Kurds are probably the least united. Difficulty of communication in the mountains is, of course, the principal reason for this. Though in the first days after the Armistice there were some signs of a nascent Kurdish nationalism there was nothing approaching unity. There was no individual who could by any stretch of imagination be termed a national leader. In consequence, during the various Kurdish risings which occurred in Turkey, Persia, and Iraq, there was no co-ordination at all. The most important rebellion, that of Sheikh Sayd in Turkish Kurdistan, was easily crushed for this reason. In Iraq the chief Kurdish nationalist was Sheikh Mahmud of Suleimaniyah. Picture post cards of him have appeared bearing the title of "King of the Kurds", but in reality he was followed by only a few tribes in the Suleimaniyah area. Even with this small following he caused quite enough trouble to the British and Iraq Governments in the course of his three risings of 1919,1924, and 1931, but on no occasion was he joined by any other of the Kurdish tribes of Iraq.

Further to the north of Suleimaniyah some of the Kurdish tribes around Rowanduz possessed some Kurdish sentiment, which was in reality more anti-Arab than anything else, but in the Amadiyah area northeast of Mosul there appeared to be very little Kurdish nationalism, and even Sheikh Ahmed el Barzan, whose territory did not come under proper administration until 1932, was pro-Barzan rather than pro-Kurdistan. Some of the other tribes had given considerable trouble during the early days of the British occupation and of the Iraqi state, but this was largely due to Turkish propaganda, and to the natural dislike on the part of the robber barons of being brought under control.

The real Kurdish propaganda in Iraq was limited to the Suleimaniyah district. It was from here that the petitions to the League were prepared. The Kurds had one sound grievance. It was hopeless to imagine that a Kurdish State could be formed in Iraq, with the majority of the Kurds under the yoke of Turkey and Persia. But the League Frontier Commission in 1925 had definitely reported as follows:

> *"The territory (the Mosul Vilayet) must remain under the effective Mandate of the League of Nations for a period which may be put as twenty-five years". The Commission is convinced that if the League of*

> *Nations' control was to terminate on the expiry of the four years' Treaty now in force between Great Britain and Iraq, and if certain guarantees of local administration were not given to the Kurds, the majority of the people would have preferred Turkish to Arab sovereignty. The Commission is also convinced that the advantages of the union of the disputed territory with Iraq would in that case be exchanged for very serious political difficulties, and considers that, under these circumstances, it would be most advantageous for the territory to main under the sovereignty of Turkey, whose internal conditions and external political situation are incomparably more stable than those of Iraq'.*

And here was the termination of the Mandate a little more than seven years later, while the only 'guarantee of local administration' was the Language Law applying to Kurdish-speaking areas.

The minorities question seriously exercised the minds of the members of the Permanent Mandates Commission at its meeting in November 1930. The accredited representative of Great Britain, Major Young (now Sir Hubert Young, Governor of Northern Rhodesia), who had recently been appointed Counsellor to the High Commissioner in Baghdad, was seriously heckled. M. Rappart, who was Rapporteur on the question of the Kurdish petitions, even went so far as to state that 'there appeared to be something rather casual in the attitude of the Mandatory Power which was alone responsible for the faithful protection of the interests of the minorities'. While the Chairman in summing up agreed with M. Rappart, observing, 'The policy of the Mandatory Power was of no concern to the Commission except in so far as it affected the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of the obligations which it has assumed under the terms of the Mandate. It was a question of principle in so far as the Permanent Mandates Mission was concerned, because it had been charged by the Council with the duty of inquiring fully into the working of the Mandate'.

It was undoubted that much of the opposition to the termination of the British Mandate arose from the French desire to retain theirs over Syria, a far more advanced country than Iraq. It was also true that the publication of the terms of the Anglo-Iraqi

Treaty of 1931 had caused not a little suspicion and resentment in the Chancelleries of Europe. It was thought, not perhaps without some reason, that Great Britain, while ridding herself of the expenses and responsibilities of the Iraqi Mandate, had managed to reserve for herself a preferential position in the country, where her Ambassador was to be the doyen of all foreign representatives, and where she, and she alone, was entitled to have a number of Air Force bases. Nevertheless, there is not doubt that the members of the Permanent Mandates Commission were genuinely anxious as to the future of minorities in Iraq, and in particular as to the Assyrians. A petition regarding the Assyrians had been received by the League. The writer of it, a Captain Rassam, though of Assyrian descent, was hardly qualified to speak for the Assyrians, still less for the Yezidis and Jews, whom he also claimed to represent. There was, however, no doubt that the Assyrians, though even now they hardly credited that the British Mandate was about to terminate in the near future, felt genuine alarm. Their position, indeed, was quite different from that of the Kurds, who were first of all indigenous to the country, and, more important still, were Moslems. For whatever may be said to the contrary there never has been and there still is not any real equality between Moslem and Christian in a Moslem State. The Christians may be tolerated, and there may not be anything in the nature of persecution, but they cannot be considered to be in all respects the equals of the Moslems, and this even in Iraq where the Arabs for the most part are not wildly fanatical.

In June 1931 the question of the minorities in Iraq again came before the Permanent Mandates Commission. In the meantime the British High Commissioner in Baghdad, Sir Francis Humphrys, had prepared a lengthy Ten Years□Report on the progress of Iraq under the Mandate. Considerable space in this report was given to the Assyrian as well as to the Kurdish question. Sir Francis himself attended the meetings of the Permanent Mandates Commission as accredited representative of Great Britain. He was able to convince the members that all was likely to be well on the termination of the Mandate. He was asked by M. Orts as to the views of the British Government on one very important aspect of the question now before the Commission. To quote from the minutes of the Twentieth Session of the Commission:

□*M. Orts said that he would be glad to have the British Government□s views on*

one very important question now before the Commission. On page 10 of the special report it was stated that His Majesty's Government had never regarded the attainment of an ideal standard of organization and stability as a necessary condition of the termination of the Mandatory regime. The report went on to say that the aim of the British Government had been to set up, within fixed frontiers a self-governing State enjoying friendly relations with neighbouring States, and equipped with stable legislature, judicial, and administrative systems, and all the working machinery of a civilized Government. This conception of the mission of the Mandatory and the conditions necessary for terminating the Mandate could be accepted without reservation.

The British Government had shown with legitimate pride that Iraq now possessed all the machinery of a civilized Government and deduced from that, that the country was henceforth capable of self-government, without waiting to be in a position to challenge comparison with the most highly developed and most civilized countries. Was it sufficient, however, for a country to present externally the appearance of an organized State to conclude from that that it had attained political maturity?

That Iraq possessed all the political and administrative machinery of a State and that in its Constitution were embodied the principles of which the majority of modern Constitutions were based were facts which the Mandates Commission could affirm, seeing that they were within its field of observation. It still remained to know whether there existed in the country that spirit which animated these institutions and was the essential condition for their working. This was a point on which the Commission itself could not form an opinion, since it lay outside its field of observation.

So far as this question was concerned, it must rely entirely on the Mandatory Power which had been intimately associated with the political, moral, and social evolution of Iraq. If the Mandatory Power attested that Iraq could stand alone, it guaranteed that the public spirit, the political morality, had progressed at the same rate as the organization. Was it clearly understood that in the case of Iraq, Great Britain took that responsibility?

The accredited representative knew how anxious the Commission was about the future of the minorities, and M. Orts desired to lay stress on the fact that it was, above

all, this anxiety which had led him to ask the question. Twelve years ago Iraq had been included among the countries whose existence as an independent nation had only been provisionally recognized on condition that they were guided by a Mandatory. One of the reasons why Iraq was refused complete independence was that it was not yet considered to possess that spirit of tolerance which made it possible to place in its charge, without any apprehension, the fate of the racial and religious minorities established in the territories accorded to the country.

Sir Francis Humphrys thought that he could best answer M. Orts observations concerning the spirit which should prevail in Iraq by asking the Commission to glance at Paragraph 1, Anglo-Iraqi Relations, on pages 11-12 of the special report. He replied as follows:

As regards tolerance, he might say, realizing the heavy responsibility which lay on him, that he could assure the Commission that, in his thirty years experience of Mohammedan countries, he had never found such tolerance of other races and religions as in Iraq. He attributed this partly to the fact that Moslems, Jews, and Christians had been used to living amicably together in the same villages for centuries. The present rulers of Iraq had, until the last twelve years, formed a minority themselves, and had every reason now to feel sympathy for fellow minorities. One of the chief difficulties in regard to the Assyrians was the constant influx of refugees from Turkey, Russian, and Persia. If these immigrants had really felt that the Moslems of Iraq were intolerant, it was hardly conceivable that they should come into the country as they did.

His Majesty's Government, he declared, fully realized its responsibilities in recommending that Iraq would be admitted to the League, which was, in its view, the only legal way of terminating the Mandate. Should Iraq prove herself unworthy of the confidence which had been placed in her, the moral responsibility must rest with His Majesty's Government, which would not attempt to transfer it to the Mandates Commission.

M. Orts expressed himself as completely satisfied with this declaration on the part of the accredited representative which, he said, was perhaps the most

important that had been made during the present examination of the situation in Iraq.

At the same time the Permanent Mandates Commission did fully realize that Great Britain could have no responsibility for or control over the internal affairs of Iraq following the termination of the Mandate, and the President of the Commission spoke as follows: "*The responsibility retained by the Mandatory Power lay in the initiative it had taken in proposing the emancipation of the Mandated territory. I consider that it is very difficult to impose on the Mandatory Power, after the expiration of the Mandate, responsibility for the activity of a State which has become sovereign*".

In the course of his earlier remarks Sir Francis had dealt with the petitions submitted to the League on behalf of the Assyrians by Captain Rassam and Mr. Cope. He pointed out with justice that these two individuals could not properly be accepted as representatives of the Assyrians, even though they appeared to have been thus authorized by the Assyrian patriarch so to act. It must be admitted, however, that the Rapporteur to the Commission, M. Rappart, in respect of a similar Kurdish petition, had been himself rather doubtful, stating, "*In the absence of all possibility of conducting an impartial investigation, the Commission is bound to accept the reassuring statements of the Mandatory Power*".

At the next session in November of the same year, the question of the Assyrians again came up. Some of the members of the Committee again expressed apprehension as to the future of the minorities, and in particular of the Assyrians. Sir Francis Humphrys again reassured them, though perhaps he was going rather too far in saying that he did not believe the statements made in the petitions that the minorities were afraid of oppression. Their fear, he said, was dictated by mere material reasons. For instance, 1,800 Assyrians were employed in the Iraqi Levies at a high rate of pay, about Rs. 35 (£2 ,12 s) a month on the average. When the Mandate came to an end the majority of these men would lose their posts. "Moreover," he continued, "what reason had they to be afraid of oppression now, if they were not afraid before Mandatory control was established? The Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Yezidis were well treated in the time of the Turks and there was no reason why they should be badly treated after the termination of the Mandate". The Assyrians and Yezidis, at any rate, would hardly have agreed with the last sentence. It is, moreover, an undoubted fact that many of the Assyrians were genuinely nervous as to the prospects of a massacre on the termination

of the Mandate. This fear may have been, and probably was, caused by the propaganda of the family of the Mar Shimun, but it is undeniable that it existed. The Bishop in Jerusalem visited several Assyrian villages in the summer of 1933, and in nearly every one he found evidence of such alarm.

Finally, the Commission submitted a special report to the League Council regarding the termination of the Mandate. It quoted verbatim the declaration made by Sir Francis Humphrys, "the great importance of which the Council will have appreciated". It recommended that:

> *In the case of Iraq the Commission is of opinion that the protection of racial, linguistic, and religious minorities should be ensured by means of a series of provisions inserted in a declaration to be made by the Iraqi Government to the Council of the League of Nations, and by the acceptance of the rules and procedure laid down by the Council in regard to petitions concerning minorities, according to which, in particular minorities themselves, as well as any person, associating or interested State, have the right to submit petitions to the League of Nations.*

The Council accepted these recommendations. Iraq gave the required minority guarantees, and Iraq became an independent and sovereign State on October 3rd, 1932. At a subsequent meeting in December of the same year the League Council considered certain petitions received from the Assyrians. The representative of the Iraqi Government undertook that his Government would appoint a foreign official to advise in the settlement of those Assyrians and non-Assyrians who were landless in Iraq and that no obstacles would be placed in the way of any Assyrian who wished to leave the country. The Council accepted these recommendations. The League, however, had not yet done with the problem of the Assyrians.

To sum up as briefly as possible. It can scarcely be represented that Great Britain ever gave to the Assyrians any definite guarantees that they would be returned to their Hakkiari homes. The British authorities, both in England and in Mesopotamia, certainly hoped that this would be possible. Circumstances, however, were too strong. The gigantic happenings in the West, the immense difficulties accompanying the peace negotiations, prevented the Allied statesmen from giving much time to even the major

problems of the Middle East.

General war weariness and the complete unanimity of the British Press regarding the necessity of reducing our commitments in Mesopotamia were equally important factors. Other writers have described how experts from the Near and Middle East rushed prophesying Cassandra - like through the corridors of Versailles. And in this case, at any rate, the experts were right. The delays in the making of the Peace Treaty with Turkey brought ruin, misery, and death to many thousands besides the Assyrians.

Promises given in the heat of the battle are seldom compatible with the conditions found on the termination of war. The Arabs claim that they have been deceived. All hopes of an Armenian republic have vanished. The Kurds, though they certainly were not our Allies during the war, have been disappointed.

As regards the Assyrians, it must be admitted that even if they received no definite guarantees from Great Britain, they knew quite well that the British hoped that their homelands would be restored to them. They could not believe that so powerful a nation, victorious in the greatest war of history, could not have brought this about if it really meant to do so. They did not understand the world exhaustion of the time; they did not understand the many complications in Europe which prevented the statesmen at Versailles from turning to so trivial a matter as the settlement of a few thousand mountaineers.

The only real opportunity of the Assyrians being able to return to Hakkiari occurred just after the Armistice. This was lost and never occurred again. Whether their return would have been a final solution of the Assyrian problem, is to say the least of it, a matter for debate.

On the other hand, it must be admitted that the League of Nations, when the termination of the British Mandate over Iraq was being discussed, hardly appears to have realized, perhaps owing to lack of information, the essentially political nature of the Assyrian problem.

CHAPTER VII: THE MAR SHIMUN

The Assyrian Patriarchal family has had a stormy history. As has been explained already (refer to Chapter I), the Mar Shimun is celibate, and succession goes in the indirect line, usually to a nephew. In pre-war days the Mar Shimun exercised a dual authority. He was the Patriarch of the East and so head of the Nestorian Church. He was also a tribal chieftain. It has already been described how the Turks had little or no real authority in the mountains of Kurdistan, and thus were compelled to deal with the tribes through their chiefs. The religious authority of the Mar Shimun had never been challenged until the succession of the present holder to the title, Eshai, who at the time of his succession in 1920 was a boy of eleven. He was the nephew of Paulos, who had succeeded his elder brother Benjamin, murdered by Simco in 1918, and who died of consumption in the Baquba camp. Both Paulos and Benjamin were in their early twenties at the time of their death; Benjamin indeed had succeeded when he was not much older than Eshai. There was thus nothing novel in the election of a young boy as Patriarch. The circumstances of the election of Eshai were, however, unusual, for he was elected when most of his people had left Baquba for Vincan. The family of the Mar Shimun had remained behind, mainly because the members of it disapproved of Agha Petros and of his enterprise. It is alleged that some of the canonical rites essential to the induction of a Mar Shimun were lacking, and the enemies of the Patriarch from time to time assert that this election was illegal.

Although the Mar Shimun had never been seriously disputed, his authority as chief of the Assyrian tribes was by no means always unquestioned. This waxed and waned with the personality of the holder. Perhaps before the war it was never denied in so many words, but if the Mar Shimun was weak and the maliks of the different tribes were strong, they paid little more than lip-service. Even under such circumstances he would receive his "tithes", though he probably found it convenient not to interfere too greatly in the internal affairs of the tribes. At the same time, as stated in an earlier chapter, there was no possibility whatever, of anyone else coming forward as a leader of the Assyrian "Millet".

After the war it was otherwise. On the murder of Benjamin, his family suffered

somewhat of an eclipse. Outside the family of the Mar Shimun there was one really prominent individual. Agha Petros was, it is true, purely an adventurer, and he was not even of the Malik class. He had, however, been a successful soldier, and he now termed himself "Commander-in-Chief" of the Assyrians. His propaganda fell on fruitful ground among the younger Assyrians, who were living in a new world and among new ideas. The story of his attempt to form an Assyrian State and his failure has been already related. After a vain attempt to prevent the Assyrians from joining the Levies he left Iraq, and he died abroad a few years later.

The formation of the Levies was of great benefit to the family of the Mar Shimun, since its influence over the Levies spread to the whole people, and for some time there was no serious opposition. Individuals, such as Khoshaba Bishop Yawallahah, and a few others might be discontented, but even Khoshaba was among the signatories of the National Pact in June 1932 (see Chapter VIII). The propaganda which was organized by the Iraqi Government officials in 1933, as will be related later, resulted in the strengthening of the opposition, since a considerable number of Assyrians were really quite well settled, and the Assyrian Intelligentsia, such as it was, thought that the attitude of the Mar Shimun towards the Iraqi Government could only lead to harm.

The real bone of contention between the Iraqi Government and the Mar Shimun was over "temporal" power. It is not clear who first used the word "temporal" in respect of the claims of the Mar Shimun; it was unfortunate that this word ever was used. It might have been preferable had the word "secular" been employed instead. The meaning of the word "temporal" is thus defined in the Concise Oxford Dictionary:

> *"Secular as opposed to sacred. Lay as distinct from canon. Of rule, authority , or Government, civil as distinct from ecclesiastical".*

That the Mar Shimun in pre-war days exercised some kind of authority other than that of head of the Church is undisputed. The Assyrians were a "Millet" in the Turkish Empire. Until Badr Khan's massacres and destruction of villages in 1847, a "firman" had been preserved by the Patriarch of the Assyrian Church which, according to tradition, had been the gift either of the Prophet Mohammed himself or of the Khalif Omar. This "firman" gave to the Persian Christian Church (of which the Assyrian Church is the authentic representative) the right:

A) To exercise its religion and custom, and to administer its own laws of status and personnel.

B) To be a "Millet", that is, a community over which its chief Bishop presided and which its Chief Bishop represented in all communal relations with the Islamic sovereigns of the land.

The Assyrians, of course, were not the only "Millet" in Turkey. The Armenians and Chaldeans, for example, possessed the same rights - rights which ensured protection, but which admitted an inferior status to that of Moslems. Where the Assyrians differed from the other Christian "Millets" was that in their country there did not exist any real Turkish Government. The Mar Shimun thus became, as noted earlier in this chapter, a "temporal" chieftain, like the more important of the neighbouring Kurdish Aghas. This "temporal" authority, however, had never been officially, but only tacitly, recognized by the Turks; and it was the fixed policy of the Turkish Government to break the power of the mountain chieftains, as it had already during the nineteenth century, broken the powers of the semi-independent rulers of Baghdad and Mosul.

If Iraq is a "Shariat" State as Turkey was before the war, then the "millet" system would still have to recognized, but the Organic Law of Iraq lays down that all Iraqis are equal, irrespective of creed. This point is important, as it seems that the Mar Shimun was claiming the rights of the head of a "millet". Probably he himself was not quite sure what these legally were, since, as already stated, the position of the Assyrian "millet" was unlike that of the other "millets" owing to the geographical situation of the people. There is little doubt, however, that King Feisal, a member of the Hashimite House of Mecca and therefore a descendant of the Prophet, understood the Mar Shimun's point of view better than most other people, Iraqi or British, but even he did not understand it entirely.

In any case in the early days of the Iraqi State there was little change in the status of the Mar Shimun as representative of the Assyrian people. The League of Nations Commission of 1925 remarked in its report that the family holding the Patriarchate was the only Assyrian authority recognized by the British and Iraqi authorities. It was, however, quite clear that no government, organized on modern lines, such as was that of Iraq, could tolerate the continuance of such power as the Mar

Shimun had possessed before the war. Misunderstandings were likely in any event, and as soon as the word "temporal" came to be used, they became certain, and it was owing to these misunderstandings that the situation arose which brought about the tragic events of the summer of 1933.

The real trouble was that neither party did understand the other. Even the British, with their knowledge of the temporal power of the Pope, were rather at sea, though they might have known that the Pope's temporal power included the right to maintain an army and a police force, which the Mar Shimun never claimed. The Iraqis had no idea at all of what was meant, and the Arabic words "sultah zamaniah" hardly represent "temporal" power. They objected to the Mar Shimun laying claims to powers which no other individual in Iraq possessed. It is true that the Mar Shimun could point to many Arab and Kurdish chieftains as an example of the Government granting a kind of "temporal" power. For instance, in all matters concerning the great Shammar tribe, the members of which are still nomads, the Iraqi Government deals direct with Sheikh Ajil el Yawar. The Mar Shimun, however, did not realize that it was the declared policy of the Iraqi Government to lessen the power of such sheikhs though it was unable to do so at once, as it simply could not carry on without their assistance. In actual practice, the behaviour of the Government was not always quite logical. Officials were apt to disregard a sheikh when it was convenient, but to make use of him when it suited them. For instance, they might deny that Sheikh X represented anything but his particular section, but if a serious crime was committed among one of the other sections of the whole tribe over which the sheikh had formerly been paramount, they often made him responsible for finding the guilty persons. It was a typical case of "eating one's cake and still having it".

Much the same thing occurred in connection with the Mar Shimun at the time of the Levy mutiny in June 1932 when all the negotiations were carried on between him and the High Commissioner. It was only to be expected that the Mar Shimun would later on wish to be used as representative of the Assyrian people, when it happened to suit him, especially as he had been nominated by the Assyrian leaders at the Sir Amadiyah meeting in June 1932 as their representative. There is, however, no doubt that the Iraqi Government did intend to abolish the authority of the sheikhs and that

therefore the bestowal of special authority to one individual was open to every manner of objection. There is also no doubt that the Government's policy was correct. Devolution of authority may be possible in countries such as Nigeria and the Sudan, where there is a foreign central government. It could never succeed with the type of central administration such as is likely to be found in national Iraq for many years to come.

The Mar Shimun, however, was almost totally ignorant of the conditions obtaining throughout Iraq, and in consequence did not understand the significance of the Government's policy. He made more that one attempt to define what he meant by "temporal" power. In June 1933, when he had been summoned to Baghdad for conversations with the Minister of Interior, he wrote as follows in a letter addressed to the Minister:

> *With regard to the term "Temporal Power" alluded to by your Excellency when you say "The Government cannot agree to transfer to you any temporal power". I would be glad to know how this term is interpreted by you.*
>
> *Although I do not desire to dwell on this point at length I think it is necessary for me to try and elucidate the term "Spiritual and Temporal" power united together in this special case of the Patriarch Catholicos of the "East", since it seems to me that Your Excellency and the Government have taken a grave view of it. The Patriarchal authority is a great historical and traditional usage of the Assyrian people and Church, and it has been one of the established and most important customs. The temporal power has not been assumed by me, but it has descended to me from centuries past as a legalized delegation of the people to the Patriarch. It was not only tolerated but also officially recognized in the past by the old Sassanid Kings, Islamic Caliphs, Mogul Khans, and Ottoman Sultans. No proof of any misuse of this power as far as any King or Government whose subjects the Assyrian people have been can be traced in history. Whilst on the other hand, besides being in no way preventive to the application of the law of the country, it has proved to be*

the best method of dealing with a people living under the circumstances as the Assyrians are.

(Note: The original English of this letter is retained)

His explanation was hardly clear. Apart from this it was evident that he had failed to understand that the Assyrians were now living under entirely different conditions to those existing before the war. If, however, he is to be blamed for his lack of understanding, he can hardly be blamed greatly. The year before, he had been nominated by his people as their representative and his nomination must have appeared to him to have been approved by the British authorities, when he was employed by them as sole negotiator in the matter of the Levy mutiny and the Assyrian National Pact. Apart from this, ever since the establishment of the Iraqi State in 1920, it had been the unchecked custom of Assyrians to submit their grievances to the Mar Shimun (or, when he was absent in England, to the officer commanding the Levies), and by him they were forwarded to the High Commissioner, who in turn, passed them on to the Iraqi Government. It was seldom that Assyrians appealed direct to the Iraqi officials, nor indeed had the Mar Shimun himself had much contact with them until 1933. The change-over, when it came, was abrupt and to Assyrians almost incomprehensible.

The Mar Shimun is almost universally held by those responsible Iraqis - and they are many - who genuinely regret the excesses of August 1933 as being the one person who brought them about. He is considered to be little less than a criminal. It is, the Iraqis consider, solely owing to him that the excesses took place in the north, which have, as they realize, sullied the good name of Iraq. Such views are far fetched. It can hardly be denied that the Mar Shimun has made many and serious mistakes. Could it have been otherwise? Think of the circumstances of his early boyhood. Think of his succession to the Patriarchate at the age of eleven, of his education in England with the consequent admixture of Western ideas with those of his native East. (He was in England from 1925 until 1929, and attended St. Augustine's College, Canterbury, a theological college for the training of missionaries, and Westcott House, Cambridge. During this period he did not return to Iraq). He has besides, been singularly unfortunate in his advisers. His aunt, Surma, is capable and strong-minded, but circumstances have made her a fanatic. His father, David, though he had shown

himself a good soldier in the early days, was to put it mildly, not receptive of new ideas. Some of the maliks were purely selfish. The most influential, Ismail, of the Upper Tiyari, was an old man in indifferent health. It was, perhaps, not surprising that the young man fell a ready prey to adventurers and others. He accepted at their face value the protestations of Captain Rassam and Mr. Cope, whose pro-minority agitation in 1930 did more harm to the minorities than anything else, as it made the Iraqis suspicious and the British angry. He was distrustful of the British officials in the service of the Iraqi Government, considering that these had at heart only the interests of Iraq, however much such interests might prove detrimental to the Assyrians. He undoubtedly believed that it was only through him that the Assyrian cause could be advanced. He is not, by any means, the only person who has thus thought himself to be indispensable. Nevertheless, if he was mistaken in this, surely this did not necessarily mean that he placed the interests of his house before that of his people. He had been led honestly to believe that promises given to the Assyrian people had been broken. All his people believed the same thing, and had he attempted to tell them that they were wrong, it is at least possible that the party opposed to him would have seized the opportunity of naming him a traitor to his people. For, as always in the East, most differences are personal. There is not doubt that it has been one of the greatest misfortunes of the Assyrians that in the years immediately following the war they did not possess a strong and experienced leader. Such a leader could only have been the Mar Shimun, and it was indeed tragic that the holders of the title should then have been firstly an invalid and then a young boy.

In the course of this book it has been necessary not infrequently to criticize the character and the conduct of the Assyrians, and to point out the mistakes committed by the Mar Shimun. It is hoped that this has been done as impartially as possible. Nevertheless, it seems to be only fair to put forward without comment the alleged grievances of the Assyrians. How far these grievances are well founded perhaps the reader will be able to judge for himself. The Assyrian case is briefly as follows:

The Assyrians entered the war on the pressing invitation of the Russians. By allying themselves to the Russians they automatically became Allies of all the nations which were fighting against the Central Powers. During the war they were twice

betrayed by the Russians, and as a consequence they lost not only their homes but two-thirds of their people.

The Assyrians admit that on their retreat to Hamadan they were saved from annihilation by the intervention of the British forces, though they allege that these forces failed to arrive at the rendezvous at the appointed time. They also admit with gratitude that the British maintained them on their arrival at Baghdad. But they assert that at that time they had not the slightest desire to remain in Iraq. It is only with this object in view that they agreed to form the battalions at Hamadan in September 1918. A letter written by Colonel McCarthy is quoted, the relevant portions of which are given here:

> *I have made a strong point of the fact that your people were definitely promised by me (acting under orders from headquarters of course) that they would have their country restored to them and that my orders and only reason for raising the Assyrian contingent in Hamadan in 1918 was to drive the Turk out and reoccupy the country.*

The Assyrians also quote letters form a French and a Russian officer, who were present when Captain Gracey was, at the end of 1917, endeavouring to organize the Armenian-Kurdish-Assyrian Front, as proof that the British authorities urged them to continue their resistance to the Turks. These letters are quoted to disprove the statement, sometimes made, that the Assyrians were not Allies of Great Britain during the war. As a matter of fact, the question of their having been Allies can hardly be disputed. Sir Percy Cox, High Commissioner in Iraq, wrote as follows in his official report on the administration in Iraq, October 1920 to March 1922:

> *The Assyrians, who numbered about 35,000, were the most important element, for they had been recognized as Allies by Great Britain in the war and had been used by her in the campaign in Kurdistan in 1919.*

And on May 1st, 1924, the High Commissioner in Baghdad wrote as follows:

> *His Britannic Majesty's Government has given the most careful consideration for some time to the question of safeguarding the interest of*

the Assyrian people, keeping in view both the services which they rendered to the Allied Cause during the war and their future relations with the Government of Iraq.

The Assyrians claim that politically and from the military point of view they were largely responsible for the annexation of the Vilayet of Mosul to Iraq and not to Turkey. As soldiers they were, they assert, employed to resist the encroachments of the Turks, when there was no Iraqi Army available. They hold that politically the arguments in favour of the Hakkiari highlands being included in Iraq, though they failed in this particular to the great detriment of the Assyrians, did in fact influence the League of Nations Commission in assigning Mosul to Iraq, quoting the following extract from a statement by Sir Henry Dobbs. (See Letters of Gertrude Bell, Part II, page 552).

In order to reassure them (the Assyrians) as to their future, two successive Iraqi Cabinets, those of Jafar Pasha and Yasin Pasha, officially pledged the Government of Iraq to provide lands in Iraq for those Assyrians who might be dispossessed of their original homes by the decision of the League of Nations and to devise a system of administration for them which would ensure to them the utmost possible freedom from interference.

It can hardly be doubted that this liberal attitude on the part of the Iraqi Government had its influence on the deliberations of the Frontier Commission.

The Assyrians protest that the promise thus made to them by the Iraqi Government have not been carried out.

They also point to the following recommendations of the Frontier Commission, which later were embodied in its report:

Since the disputed territory will in any case be under the sovereignty of a Moslem State, it is essential that to satisfy the aspirations of the minorities - notably the Christians, but also the Jews and the Yezidis - measures should be taken for their protection.

It is not within our competence to enumerate all the conditions which

would have to be imposed on the Sovereign State for the protection of the minorities. We feel it our duty, however, to point out that the Assyrians should be guaranteed the re-establishment of the ancient privileges, which they possessed in practice, if not officially, before the war. Whichever may be the Sovereign State, it ought to grant these Assyrians a certain local autonomy, recognizing their right to appoint their own officials and contenting itself with a tribute from them paid through the agency of their Patriarch . The status of minorities would necessarily have to be adapted to the special conditions of the country. We think, however, that the arrangements made for the benefit of the minorities might remain a dead letter, if no effective supervision were exercised locally.

The League of Nations representative on the spot might be entrusted with this supervision.

The Assyrians assert that, as prophesied by the League of Nations Frontier Commission, its recommendations for the welfare of the Assyrians remained a dead letter, and no League Commissioner on the spot was appointed. They claim that they again and again warned those concerned that once British influence was withdrawn, their position would be intolerable in Iraq unless effective guarantees for their future safety had been obtained. They state that the members of the Permanent Mandates Commission expressed great anxiety as to the future of the Assyrians on the termination of the British Mandate and that it was only with great difficulty that they were persuaded by Sir Francis Humphrys that all would be well.

With regard to their relations with the Turks, the Assyrians assert that from 1921 to 1924 the Tiyari and Tukhuma tribes lived peacefully in their old homes, and that if they had been allowed to deal with the Turks themselves all would have gone well. They claim that the Turks became highly suspicious on learning that the British officers had visited Hakkiari to recruit Assyrians for the Levies and that this was the real reason why the Turks decided to evict them. They also point out that it was because 70 percent of their able-bodied men were serving in the Levies at the time that they were helpless to resist the Turks in the spring of 1924. The Assyrians go still further in suggesting that one of the principal reasons which induced the Turks to evict the

Assyrians from Hakkiari was the fear of the establishment of a kind of buffer State under British influence on the Turco-Iraqi frontier.

As regards the Kurds, the Assyrians also assert that the frequent employment of Assyrian Levies against the Kurds embittered relations between the two peoples. Prior to this, though there had been no love lost, the Kurds and the Assyrians did understand each other. The Assyrians considered that they were being used to maintain the balance of power between the Kurds and the Arabs and that this naturally angered the Kurds, whom as a matter of fact the Assyrians much preferred to the Arabs.

In regard to the attempted settlements, Assyrians put forward many grievances, that they were not homogeneous and that the villages were unhealthy, but as these have been mentioned in an earlier chapter (Chapter IV), it is unnecessary to mention them here.

In respect of the alleged claim of the Mar Shimun for temporal power, the Assyrians assert that much harmful propaganda has appeared in the Press on this subject, the object of which was to mislead public opinion and distract attention from the main object. The Assyrians assert that it is an undisputable fact that for many centuries the Patriarch was recognized as supreme head of the □millet□. This continued until the Assyrians came to Iraq in 1918, when it was no longer considered necessary. The only times since then, they claim, that the Mar Shimun practised this □so-called temporal power□was when he was requested to do so by the British High Commissioner, and in particular when Sir Francis Humphrys employed him as intermediary between the Assyrians and the Mandatory Power at the time of the Levy mutiny in June 1932. (An account of this affair is given in Chapter VIII). It is claimed that from the formation of the Arab Government in 1920 until his deportation in August 1933, the Mar Shimun neither orally nor in writing applied for temporal power either to the Mandatory Power or to the Iraqi Government.

{ THAT IS THE SUBSTANCE OF THE ASSYRIANS□CASE}

CHAPTER VIII: THE END OF THE MANDATE

As we have seen, Arabs and Assyrians alike found it hard to imagine that the British Mandate would definitely end in 1932. The Iraqi statesmen, from their close contact with the British authorities, must have well understood that this was so, but the nation as a whole had never been able to credit it, for they had accepted at its face value the propaganda of the nationalist Press that Britain was the most grasping of all nations and that it was inconceivable that she should give up anything she held without being compelled by force to do so.

The Assyrians thought the same. When they at last understood that the end of the Mandate was at hand their reaction was immediate and unfavourable, for they considered that they had been betrayed. Their grievance was that Britain had failed to keep her promise to return them to Hakkiari; and ill-founded though this grievance may have been, it was none the less genuine and deep-seated. They pointed to their services to Britain during and since the war. They felt, moreover, that they were in every way superior to the Arabs, and they resented being, as they said, handed over to the tender mercies of the Moslems. Mention had been made earlier of their complaints regarding the conditions of their settlement, but there was more in it than that. The Assyrians considered that culturally they were more advanced than the Arabs, and they resented being put under the rule of a people to whom they felt themselves superior. They feared, too, that the new Iraqi Government would not have the power, even if it had the will, to restrain their ancient enemies, the Kurds. So to dislike and contempt were added suspicion and fear, and when these are united, especially in the East, there is little hope of a satisfactory solution. In the early summer of 1932 everyone in Iraq suddenly realized that the British Mandate was to end in a few months. Feeling in the country was acute. Those who had been fed on the nationalist press thought, or affected to think, that Great Britain would still use the Christians of the north, particularly the Assyrians, in order to get the League of Nations on some question of the minorities to delay the granting of independence to Iraq. There was much coming and going among the politicians with deputations to Europe, and preparations for the new independence. The Kurds were quiet, thanks to the drastic action which, with the help

of the British Air Force, had been taken against the recalcitrant sheikhs during the previous year or two. Small boys in the streets of Baghdad ran about talking of "Istiqlal", or independence. The coffee shops buzzed with the talk of those who hoped for preferment or feared displacement. In all parts of the country there was the same effervescence of political excitement. The older generation who knew the Turkish regime contrasted it, to its advantage, with the British regime that had existed from the time of the military occupation at the end of the war. They remembered that taxation was now higher and that it was not possible, under the British authorities, to evade payment to the extent that they had done in the Turkish days. Those who had grown up accustomed to the Ottoman slackness had never ceased to gird at the tightening up of the administration under the British. The younger men whose early years of political consciousness had been spent in the atmosphere of Wilsonian determination at the end of the war, were keen advocates of the Arab cause, and the keenness of their advocacy varied with individual motives.

So far as concerned the British community, they suddenly realized that the British regime was over, for while it was fully understood that the Mandate was not permanent, few had imagined that Britain would give it up so soon. There were those, indeed, who said that Britain was scuttling out too quickly, and that the Arabs, as early as 1932, were by no means fit for self-government - this quite apart from any question of the security or even the fair treatment of the minorities. The Chaldeans and the Armenians, essentially unwarlike, moaned in private. The Assyrians kept their own counsel, so much so, that on the morning of June 1st, the last thing in the world that the British levy officers expected was mutiny.

Yet that is what happened. In the course of that day the officer in command was handed a document signed by all the Levy officers, with one exception, stating that the levies had decided to terminate their engagement as from July 1st. The reason they gave was their dissatisfaction with the conditions of Assyrians in Iraq following the termination of the Mandate. It has been shown that David, the father of the Mar Shimun, had for some considerable time been acting as liaison officer at Levy Headquarters. On this occasion he gave no indication of what was afoot, although he must have known all about it. After the first shock of surprise it was thought that the

mutinous movement was solely inspired by the Mar Shimun, but it soon became evident that it was the expression of the wishes of the whole people. Indeed, it may be doubted whether the Mar Shimun himself knew much about it - he was ill at the time - although the plan certainly originated from his family, with his aunt, Surma Khanum, as the leading spirit.

The atmosphere remained electric for about a fortnight, and then a meeting of the Assyrian leaders, under the presidency of the Mar Shimun, was held at Sir Amadiyah on June 16th, when a kind of Assyrian National pact was drawn up. This Pact consisted of a number of demands, and it was stated that if these were accepted the levy resignations would be withdrawn. The Assyrians did not realize that the British Government could not possibly yield to such an ultimatum, and a good deal of surprise was expressed when the British authorities decided to bring by air from Egypt the 1st Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment - a noteworthy feat of transport and much the greatest of its kind that had ever been attempted. Two companies remained in Baghdad, and the rest of the Battalion was sent to Mosul and elsewhere in the north where there were Levy garrisons. The behaviour of the levies was excellent, except in Baghdad, where there was considerable anxiety for several days, as the Levies displayed a truculent temper towards their British officers and were to all intents and purposes out of control.

While, no doubt, the arrival of the British troops showed the Levies that the British Government could not be bullied, the main factor inducing them to withdraw their resignations was the attitude of the Mar Shimun. Interchange of letters took place between him and Sir Francis Humphrys, the British High Commissioner, who was recalled to Baghdad when on his way to England on leave. Finally, the Mar Shimun agreed to write to the Levies, instructing them to withdraw their resignations. The conditions of continued service were as follows:

1. The levies would continue to serve loyally until discharged.
2. They would not again attempt to resign in a body.
3. That if no satisfactory reply was given by the League of Nations to the demands of the Assyrian National Pact the Levies agreed to be

discharged, not simultaneously, but over a considerable period.

4. They undertook not to interfere in politics in future.

The Assyrian leaders, including the Mar Shimun, were asked to give an undertaking that they, for their part, would not attempt to interfere in the discipline of the Levies.

On June 29th the Mar Shimun sent letter to the different Levy detachments instructing them to give the required undertaking. The three companies at Hinaidi, the British Air Force headquarters, just outside Baghdad, at first refused, as the letter did not bear the Patriarchal seal. The seal was obtained the next day, but the companies remained truculent, if not actually mutinous, and were confined to camp. The Mar Shimun then wrote another letter, which finally convinced them. The 1st Battalion Northants remained in Iraq until the first week in August, when they returned to Egypt, again by air. Following this incident eight officers and 235 men resigned from the Levies.

Perhaps the most important feature of this levy mutiny, as it must be called, and which came as a great shock to the British officers, who had trusted the Assyrians so implicitly, was that throughout all the negotiations the Mar Shimun acted as representative of the Assyrian people. As a result his claim for "temporal" authority was greatly strengthened. He had been used when it was convenient to the British Government to use him. Rather naturally, he desired to be used when, in his opinion, it was convenient to the Assyrians.

It is still uncertain what the Levies really intended to do if their bluff had not been called. There was a good deal of talk of a concentration in the north, probably at Dohuk. This greatly alarmed the Iraqi authorities. The prospect of an armed and obviously hostile force moving through the country was the reverse of agreeable. There must have been trouble on the march. What the Assyrians intended to do after their concentration is equally uncertain. The idea that they intended to carve out a kingdom of their own appears to be utterly fantastic, but they may nevertheless have had some such idea at the back of their minds, especially as there is reason to suppose that they expected some help from the Kurds, many of whom were known to be dissatisfied with

the prospect of Arab domination. Or they may have decided to march en masse into Syria in the vain hope that the French would receive them.

At the end of June a second meeting of Assyrian leaders was held at Sir Amadiyah. At this the Mar Shimun's conduct of affairs in connection with the Levy mutiny was approved, and he was nominated as representative of the Assyrian people.

The Assyrians, in drawing up their National Pact, were but following the example of the Turkish nationalists at Angora in 1920. The demands, which made up the Pact, were as follows:

1. The Assyrians to be recognized as a "millet", domiciled in Iraq, and not merely as a racial or religious community.
2. Their former Hakkiari homes should be returned to them.
3. A) That if (2) was impossible, a new home should be provided in Iraq open to all Assyrians in and outside Iraq, with headquarters at Dohuk. This province should be under an Arab Mutaserrif, who should be assisted by a British advisor.

   B) A commission should be formed to provide suitable lands, necessary funds should be provided; the lands should be registered in the name of the Assyrians.

   A note was added that it would not be necessary to evict any Kurds, as ample lands were available without doing so.

   C) Priority to Assyrians in administrative appointments in this area.
4. The temporal and ecclesiastical leadership of the Mar Shimun should be officially recognized by the Iraqi Government, and the Mar Shimun should be granted a high decoration by the Iraqi Government.
5. A Deputy in Parliament should be appointed from the Assyrian community.
6. Schools should be opened in which Assyrian as well as Arabic should be taught.

7. Wagfs (endowments) should be established for the religious leaders.
8. A Civil Hospital should be opened at Dohuk, with Dispensaries in the villages.
9. Assyrian rifles should not be confiscated.

If these demands were accepted the Levies resignations would be withdrawn.

The list ended with a protestation of loyalty to King Feisal and the Iraqi Government, and an offer to provide:

A) Air defence for the British R.A.F. aerodromes (but for health reasons not in Basra or Shaiba).

B) One battalion for the Iraqi Army.

These demands were clearly unacceptable to the Iraqi Government. The first demand was contrary to the provisions of the Organic Law. Apart from this, if this Assyrian demand was granted, similar demands would certainly be advanced by Kurds, Yezidis, and other Christian minorities, not to mention the Shia Moslems, who objected most strongly to the preponderance of political and administrative powers in the hands of the Sunnis in Baghdad.

As regards demand (2), there was not the slightest likelihood of this being obtained. The Turks had been steadfast in their refusal to permit the return of the Assyrians. In 1928 they had turned back a party which had attempted to cross the frontier. Mustapha Kemel Pasha himself had said quite recently in a private conversation that though he bore no ill will towards the Assyrians, their return could not even be considered for many years to come. Turkey could not endure any Christian minorities, as it had determined to avoid any possible complications with the European Powers, such as had occurred in the past, and had done so much harm not only to Turkey but to Christians themselves. It may here be remarked that the Hakkiari district is still unoccupied. It appears to be a tragedy that the only people who want it cannot have it. Whether, however, the Assyrians, after the more comfortable life which they have been leading in towns and in villages close to civilization, would be really contented in those inhospitable highlands is another question. For the Assyrians, or most of them, are now a very different people from what they were before the war and their standard of living has improved out of all knowledge.

As regards the third demand - it was not quite clear what area was intended. The three Qodhas in Mosul Liwa, where there were most Assyrians, were Dohuk, Amadiyah, and Sheikhan. But even here they were in a minority. For there were approximately sixty thousand Moslems, mostly Kurds, fourteen thousand Assyrians, and seven thousand other Christians. Apart from this, it was hardly likely that the Iraqi Government could permit the immigration into Iraq of Assyrians from outside. There were probably ten thousand in Persia, mostly near Urmiyah and at least fifteen thousand scattered over Russia, not to mention a large but unknown number in the United States. Many of these would be unwilling or unable to come, but the arrival of even a few thousands would only add further complications. As for the statement that there were ample lands available without evicting any Kurds, this was unfortunately not the case. Every effort had been made to find such lands, but they simply did not exist. The only empty lands in the north were in the Baradost, but these were far away and the scheme to settle them had already been rejected by the Assyrians. Early in the summer of 1932 the Iraqi Government had appointed yet another Committee to investigate the question of available lands, and this Committee had made some progress, though not to the extent of suggesting that there was the slightest chance of the Assyrians being settled in a homogeneous community.

It will be noted that in the fourth demand is mention of the "temporal" power of the Mar Shimun. It is sometimes denied that the Mar Shimun ever actually laid claim to such power, but there is proof that he did. The confusions as to the real meaning of the word "temporal" have already been described, but it is clear from this demand that the Mar Shimun did claim some power other than that of the religious head of the people. The Iraqi Government had never attempted to deny his religious authority, and for some time past had been pressing him to prepare a "community" law for his people, such as the Chaldeans had possessed since Turkish times, and such as had recently been passed for the Jews. It has sometimes been cited against the Mar Shimun that in asking for a decoration he was not forgetting himself. Such criticism, however, is hardly fair. The Chaldean Patriarch had for long been the possessor of a High Turkish decoration and the Mar Shimun wished to place himself, and inferentially his Church, on the same level.

The other demands need not be discussed in detail. They are the corollary of the first four. It will be noted that the Assyrian leaders protested their loyalty to King Feisal. It thus appears that they then realized that they had no future except in Iraq, even though they were by no means satisfied with the conditions likely to be obtained there. The offer to provide a battalion for the Iraqi Army is interesting. There was, however, no likelihood of its being accepted. The Iraqi authorities were for political reasons very unwilling to form purely Kurdish battalions, while the recent events had made them more suspicious of the Assyrians than ever. If, they argued, the Assyrian Levies dared to mutiny against Great Britain, what might they not do against a weak country such as Iraq? For the Iraqi had been inclined to accept the Assyrian soldier at his own valuation, and it was commonly thought and stated by the Iraqis that one Assyrian was worth three Arab soldiers.

Further negotiations followed the publication of the National Pact. It was finally arranged that the Mar Shimun should proceed to Geneva and present the demands in person to the Council of the League. He was given a special Laissez Passer to go, since, despite his protestations of loyalty, the Mar Shimun had not yet taken out Iraq nationality papers and so had no passport. The Mar Shimun complained, nevertheless, that difficulties were placed in the way. However, he went in the end, though it does not appear that he was told that not only Iraq but Great Britain would resist his demands. The Mar Shimun left Mosul in October. He failed completely at Geneva. The proceedings there have already been described. He returned to Mosul at the end of December. Whether on his return he would have accepted the situation with the best grace possible is, perhaps, in any event doubtful, but during his absence certain things had happened which were bound to make him all the more suspicious of the good faith of the Iraqi Government.

During the late autumn of 1932 a violent campaign of propaganda and counter-propaganda had been going on in the Mosul Liwa. A certain Yacu, of whom there will be occasion to write much more, had been touring the districts of Dohuk and Amadiyah on Mar Shimun propaganda. Yacu was the son of Ismail, Malik of the Upper Tiyari, one of the most important Assyrian clans. He was a senior officer in the Levies, and had shown himself a good soldier in many engagements. That he was carrying out this

propaganda while he was still a serving soldier was certainly a breach of the spirit, it not of the letter, of the undertaking which the Levies had recently given not to interfere with politics. The local government authorities, too, had embarked on a vigorous campaign of anti-Mar Shimun propaganda. They were doing everything in their power to weaken his influence. The officials may be given credit, at any rate, for thinking that by weakening the Mar Shimun they were benefiting the Assyrians. To some extent this Government propaganda was successful, and a petition counter to the Mar Shimun, and signed by certain Assyrian leaders, was actually forwarded to the League of Nations. For, as throughout Assyrian History, there was a party actively opposed to the Mar Shimun. The leader of this party was Khoshaba, one of the chiefs, though not the real Malik of the Lower Tiyari clan. Khoshaba was a man of a stormy past. As a warrior he had done valiant service during the war. He had not taken part in the adventure of Agha Petros, with whom he had been on the worst of terms. Owing to a blood feud with a family of Kurds in the Lidan valley, he had been unable to return to Iraq when the Turks evicted the mountaineers from Hakkiari, he was, indeed, more a Persona Grata with the Turks than was any other Assyrian. On his return to Iraq he murdered his wife and daughter, whom he suspected of immoral conduct, an action which, though common enough for such a cause among the Arabs, had shocked the sensibilities of the Assyrians. A fall over a precipice in company with a bear had been a further shock to his nerves. He was a man of moods, and though his sincerity could hardly be doubted, his whole life was dominated by his hatred of the Mar Shimun. He had, however, been among the signatories of the National Pact. He was, in short, by no means a type who could ever become a national leader. In his dislike of the Mar Shimun, he was backed by the Bishop Yawallahah. This individual has been mentioned before for his gallantry in resisting the incursion of the Turks in 1921. His private life and character were, however, far from blameless. These two had long been opposed, for personal reasons, to the Mar Shimun. It was not difficult to win them over to the Government side. But gradually the Government propaganda had other successes. Bishop Sirkis of the Jilu, Zia, son of Shemsidin, the real Malik of the Lower Tiyari, Malik Nimrud of the Jilu, Malik Khammo of the Baz, and others were also won over. The news of the falling away of these people greatly angered the Mar Shimun. He was still

more incensed when he learned that Khoshaba had been, in his absence, appointed as President of the Assyrian Advisory Committee, which had been set up to assist the official committee established the previous summer to find lands for those Assyrians who were still landless. The Mar Shimun naturally felt that by this appointment of his deadliest enemy the Government had prejudged the whole case against him. In making this appointment the local Iraqi authorities were undoubtedly guilty of a serious error of judgment. They urged that Khoshaba was the only leader who would work with them, but a little less haste might have obtained the co-operation of the Mar Shimun.

An attempt on the part of the local Iraqi officials to nominate the maliks and raises of the different Assyrian tribes and sections further angered the Mar Shimun, for such appointments had by tradition and in practice always been his right. The attempt was ill-advised, especially as this was contrary to the general policy of the Iraqi Government, which years before had ceased to nominate sheikhs among the Arab tribes. Such titles had become purely honorary, and it would have been wiser to have allowed them to be so among the Assyrians also.

The Iraqi Government committed another serious mistake in not broadcasting to the Assyrians the details of the League's decision. The omission to do so allowed room for misleading reports and propaganda. The extraordinary manner in which ridiculous reports are spread and are believed in the East is well known to anyone who has lived there. The decision of the League was, it is true, published in the Arab newspapers, but the Arab newspapers were suspect among the Assyrians. A meeting of all the Assyrian leaders should certainly have been convened by the Government early in the year, so that the facts of the case and the Government policy could be explained. There was everything to gain from a frank exchange of views. Unfortunately, this meeting was not held until July 1933, when it was too late. One of the reports most generally circulated was that the League would appoint a committee of three foreigners, none of them English, who would undertake the settlement of the landless Assyrians. For, on his return, the Mar Shimun had realized that there was no future for the Assyrians except in Iraq and had told his followers that this was the case. The cause of most of the trouble last summer was, apart from the question of "temporal" power, the refusal of the Mar Shimun to co-operate with the Iraqi Government in the settlement which it was

proposing to carry out. Actually, as related in a previous chapter, the League who had accepted the Iraq Government's undertaking to appoint a foreign official, not at that time employed in Iraq, to advise it on this settlement, and Major Thomson, an experienced official from the Sudan, arrived in Mosul at the beginning of June. But even Major Thomson's arrival failed to check the reports regarding the three foreigners. In fact, the Mar Shimun's influence was such that only one definite application for land was ever made to Major Thomson.

While all this was happening the Government was taking such a serious view of the Mar Shimun's non-co-operative policy that the Minister of Interior, in May 1933, sent for him to come to Baghdad. By a coincidence it happened that King Feisal early in June left on his state visit to London. From the beginning of his reign the King had shown remarkable skill in balancing the conflicting claims of the different sections of his heterogeneous kingdom, and it is probable that had he not left Baghdad and thus lost touch with the situation, the events that were to follow in the late summer might have been averted. With the King to Europe went the best brains in the Iraqi Cabinet, the one or two statesmen-like men in that country possessed. At the helm in Baghdad was a group of ministers who lacked the wider vision and who reacted too quickly to national sentiment. When the Minister of Interior asked the Mar Shimun to come to Baghdad, it was hoped that the misunderstandings between the Patriarch and the Government might be removed by personal conversations. It was indeed essential that something should be done, for while Baghdad was Baghdad, Mosul was Mosul. In Baghdad the politicians and effendis have always been busy bandying political theory and enjoying any political intrigue. In Mosul the mixed townsfolk, Christian and Moslem, live much nearer to the brink of the volcano. A recent incident in Mosul had greatly increased the tension in the town. Stones had been thrown at the houses of certain officers of the Iraqi Army, including Bekir Sidqi Beg, who was in command at Mosul, and Assyrians were accused. What happened is still somewhat of a mystery, but it appears that it was the Assyrians who really threw the stones but that the underlying reason was personal and not political. However, as frequently happens in the East, the Iraqi Army magnified the whole affair and took it as an insult, with the result that the simmering dislike of the Assyrians, which the Iraqi Army had always felt, grew rapidly into intense hatred. The

British, as usual, were accused of connivance. A ridiculous story went the rounds that the Air Officer Commanding and Brigadier Browne, who was in command of the Levies, had visited the Mar Shimun in disguise, wearing beards and Kurdish clothes. The British liaison officer to the Iraqi Army at Mosul, Major White, was the object of bitter attacks and had to be transferred. Altogether the situation became extremely tense, for behind the hatred and suspicion was a real fear of the Assyrians. On my way up to Mosul from Diwaniyah in the south at the end of May, I had a conversation with the Minister of Interior, Hikmet Beg Suleiman, in which he expressed a real concern as to the possibility of an outbreak of the Assyrians in Mosul. There was at that time not the least likelihood of such an event, but that such a responsible person as the Minister of Interior should even consider it possible showed to what a point suspicion and misunderstanding had reached. It may be, looking back after the event, that the Army leaders had already decided that the Assyrians must be taught a severe lesson and that the concern expressed by the Minister was based upon information or tendentious propaganda put up by the Army to excuse itself in advance.

Whatever the truth, it is unfortunate that the conversations between the Minister and the Mar Shimun, which had to be carried on through an interpreter as the Mar Shimun knew little Arabic and the Minister no Syriac, only had the effect of deepening the mutual suspicion and distrust. Nor was the advice of the British Ambassador (the High Commissioner under the Mandate became the Ambassador once Iraq attained independence), or other British officials, which was freely offered to the Mar Shimun, productive any result. It must be admitted that Sir Francis Humphrys and the Mar Shimun were mutually antipathetic, while at this time the Mar Shimun thought that all British officials in the service of the Iraqi Government had no other object but to further the interests of Iraq, however much these interests might clash with those of the Assyrians.

On his arrival in Baghdad the Mar Shimun was, on May 28th, handed a letter from the Minister of Interior. The text of this letter was as follows:

> *During my recent visit to Mosul I explained to you the attitude of Government with regard to your personal position and I now wish to confirm in writing what you have already heard verbally.*

The Government is willing to recognize you officially as the Spiritual Head of the Assyrian Community and to promise that you will at all times receive the respect due to you as the holder of that position. As you have already been told by the Mutaserrif of Mosul, it is anxious to enlist your help in preparing a Community Law on the lines of those already in force in the case of other communities. In order that your spiritual dignity should be properly maintained it has under consideration the creation of a source of income to assist you in a permanent manner and it does not intend to curtail the monthly allowance which is at present paid to you until such time as it is satisfied that you have ample provision from other sources.

I must, however, make it clear that the Government cannot agree to delegate to you any temporal authority. Your position will be the same as that of the other Spiritual Heads of Communities in Iraq; in all matters of administration, the members of the Assyrian Community must conform to the laws, regulations, and manner of procedure which applies to all other Iraqis.

I need not assure you how sincerely anxious the Government is to do everything possible to see the Assyrian Community, like other Iraqis, happy and contented and loyal subjects of His Majesty the King. It has declared its policy fully to the League of Nations at Geneva, which intimated its approval.

Amongst other things, in accordance with an agreement reached there last autumn, it is obtaining the services of a foreign expert to advise in the important matter of land settlement. This expert, Major Thomson, is expected to arrive in Mosul at the end of this month. His work will be of the greatest importance to the Assyrian community, and I trust that he will receive the fullest assistance from all those who have the welfare of the community at heart. I have noticed with regret that you have up to the present adopted an unhelpful and, according to some reports, even an obstructive attitude in this very important matter, and I am therefore compelled to ask you to give me a written guarantee that you will do

nothing to make the task of Major Thomson and the Government more difficult.

If there are any points which I have not made clear in this letter, I shall be glad if you will bring them to my notice. The recognition of your position as described above is conditional on your acceptance of it and on your giving a solemn promise that you will in all ways and at all times act as a loyal subject of His Majesty the King. I shall be obliged if you will do this in a written reply to this letter in the form attached.

Enclosure

I, Mar Shimun, have perused your Excellency's letter No. S/1104, dated May 28, 1933, and accept all that is contained therein.

I hereby undertake that I will do nothing to make the task of Major Thomson and the Iraqi Government in connection with the settlement scheme difficult, and that I will in all ways and at all times act as a loyal subject of His Majesty the King.

The Mar Shimun thereupon wrote the following letter to King Feisal, dated May 31st:

I humbly request leave to give Your Majesty my opinion in the following lines about the present policy of the Mosul authorities as I see it to settle the Assyrian question.

Knowing that a word from Your Majesty at this hour to Your Majesty's Advisers could change this policy, and thus bring the affairs of the Assyrians to a successful issue.

I was ordered by the Mutaserrif of Mosul with great urgency to proceed to Baghdad immediately in response to an invitation from the Minister of Interior, to discuss with him and Major D. B. Thomson, the Foreign Expert for the new Assyrian Settlement Scheme of the Assyrian affairs.

On the sixth day after my arrival in Baghdad, and after many attempts, I was granted an interview with H. E. the Minister of Interior.

In the meantime I have word from Mosul that the authorities there

are still continuing their old policy with regard to the Assyrian question. If this is the case it is inconsistent with the purpose of my invitation to Baghdad as explained to me.

I very much regret to have to bring it to Your Majesty's notice that during my interview with H. E. the Interior minister, I was informed of the unfavourable attitude of the present Government towards me personally.

If I did not participate with the present policy adopted by Mosul authorities the reason has been that the Policy was entirely unconstructive.

I do feel most confident that the present policy which has now for some time been carried on by the Mosul Liwa authorities only, as I presume, and which has already proved a failure, is not consistent with the noble spirit of Your Majesty, which has been more than once most graciously expressed to me by Your Majesty personally.

I take advantage of your noble spirit and fatherly kindness to assure myself that Your Majesty's desire is to make the Assyrian people a contented, loyal, and helpful subject people within Your Majesty's Dominion, and to attain this end I am ready as I always have been to offer my utmost services to Your Majesty.

Hoping at this later hour that some constructive scheme can be arranged, which will enable my people and myself to prove to Your Majesty's person our loyalty and gratitude.

In his reply to the Minister the Mar Shimun declined to give his written undertaking. His letter is of some interest as in it he attempts to define the "temporal" authority of the Assyrian Patriarch, though, as noted in a previous chapter, his definition was by no means clear. In a later letter, however, written on June 28th, the Mar Shimun states that "I am not claiming temporal power in the sense of temporal power delegated to me by the Governments named (he meant the Abbasids, Turks, etc.), but was referring to the traditional customs of the Assyrians which I desire to see maintained". This was hardly clearer, nor did the letter show that the Mar Shimun in any way realized

that times had changed.

Conversations and interchange of letters continued for the next three weeks but without results. The Mar Shimun wished to return to Mosul. On June 24th, however, the Minister of Interior wrote to the Mar Shimun as follows:

"I confirm my answer given to you by telephone on Thursday that I do not wish you to leave Baghdad for the present, pending further instructions."

On June 29th the Mar Shimun wrote as follows to the Minister:

"I beg to state that the action of the Government now confirmed by your letter No. B/1273 of June 24th, detaining me in Baghdad against my will for no just cause, is illegal; and that any responsibility of what may happen when the news reaches my people rests with the Government.

I also wish to point out that the methods adopted by the local officials in dealing with the Assyrian Settlement Policy is contrary to the "Fundamental Law" or the guarantee given by the Iraqi Government to the League of Nations on May 30, 1932. Therefore I am arranging to place the documentary evidence before the proper authorities.

I am quite prepared to suffer any further injustice that the Government may put on me, but in no way will I submit to the methods which have been used to make me sign documents which betray my people into accepting an unreal fulfilment of the promises and recommendations of the League of Nations.

Finally, I again repeat, as per my previous correspondence with Your Excellency, and also through your British advisers:

A) I am willing to assist in the settlement of Assyrians in Iraq.

B) After settlement I will give the required promises in writing to do my best to make my Assyrian people as one of the most loyal law-abiding subjects of His Majesty and His Government.

C) I will then make preparations in accordance with the canons of my Church for drafting of a Law according to Your Excellency's suggestion and conformable to Article V I of the Fundamental Law.

If this is not agreeable to the Government, I claim the right to ask the League of Nations for the alternative settlement scheme (the right of Assyrians to leave Iraq).

P. S. - May I draw your excellency's attention to the inflammatory speech of an honorary Deputy recorded and broadcasted in Al-Istiylal of June 29, 1933, and other local papers inciting hatred towards the Assyrians.

The Mar Shimun sent copies of this letter to all the foreign Ministers in Baghdad.

The receipt of this letter infuriated not only the Minister of Interior but the whole Cabinet. Some of the Ministers wished legal action to be taken against him. What form such action should take was doubtful. Hikmet Beg Suleiman himself wished to arraign the Mar Shimun before the ordinary courts, but on what charge was by no means clear. On the other hand, his detention in Baghdad or elsewhere on no charge at all was quite illegal. It could be best regulated by the provisions of the Tribal Criminal and Civil Disputes Regulations. The trouble was that these regulations applied properly only to tribesmen, but as the Mar Shimun was claiming the headship of a tribe, as apart from that of a religious sect, the regulations might perhaps be stretched sufficiently to deal with him. A third alternative was the expulsion of the Mar Shimun from Iraq as an undesirable alien. The Mar Shimun had, as already stated, steadfastly refused to take out Iraqi nationality papers. On the other hand, he was as an ex-Ottoman subject now resident in Iraq technically an Iraqi national. In the end he remained in Baghdad, living at the Y.M.C.A., under more or less open arrest until the end of August, when he was expelled from Iraq under a departmental decree of very doubtful legal validity. Further complications had been, however, added by the receipt of several telegrams from King Feisal, who was now on his state visit to London, instructing the Cabinet to allow the Mar Shimun to return to Mosul on his own terms. The Ministers were much irritated by these telegrams and more than once threatened to resign. They considered that the King had allowed himself to be swayed by the views of the British Foreign Office. King Feisal, indeed, was out of touch with the situation, which had changed considerably since he had left the country a few weeks before. The whole affair may have been clumsily handled - with the depths of mutual suspicion existing it was difficult to make any progress - but the position had been reached that to allow the Mar Shimun to return to Mosul on his own terms would have been a fatal blow to the prestige of the Government.

CHAPTER IX: THE AFFAIR OF YACU

In the last chapter we have described the activities of the Mar Shimun and his immediate entourage, but there were other Assyrians in the north who were beginning to come into the picture. By the end of 1932 it was evident to everyone in Iraq that the new independence had come to stay, and the Assyrians began to feel that they must themselves cast around for some solution to their problem.

Mention was made in the last chapter of Yacu, son of Malik Ismail. In January 1933 he resigned from the Levies, with whom he had served for the three previous years at Fiana, near Rowanduz, on the newly opened motor road through the gorge into Persia. His father, Malik Ismail, now an old man, had been living there with him, but when Yacu resigned his commission both left Fiana for Simmel, a large village about ten miles from Dohuk, the name of which will become particularly familiar in later pages. (Some of the Assyrians in Simmel belonged to the Upper Tiyari, Malik Ismail□s tribe, but the majority were Baz, also originally mountaineers from Hakkiari. The bulk of the settled Upper Tiyari occupied villages in the Bageira area on the main Dohuk-Amadiyah road).

The Mar Shimun having embarked upon a policy of non-co-operation, Yacu, as one of his men, began in the early spring of 1933 to tour the Assyrian villages on a campaign of propaganda in support of this policy. His campaign was most intensive in the villages of the Dohuk district and in the Supna valley in Amadiyah. These activities were unsettling, not only to the Kurds in the neighbourhood, who had naturally heard of and were anxious about the projected Assyrian enclave in their country, but also among the Assyrians themselves, for they were now hopelessly divided, and those who had joined the pro-Government policy bitterly resented the conduct of Yacu. As always in the East, personalities came to bulk more and more largely, with the result that the questions at issue tended to be regarded less and less strictly on their merits. Mekki Beg el Sherbiti, Qaimaqam of Dohuk, had been particularly successful in detaching Assyrians from the Mar Shimun and in so doing he had earned the hatred of his followers. Yacu and Mekki Beg were personally antagonistic. Of all the Iraqi officials, none has been so bitterly attacked by the Assyrians as the Qaimaqam of Dohuk. He

has been almost universally described as a bloodthirsty murderer. This was far from being the case. Mekki Beg came from Mosul and was an Iraqi nationalist. He desired nothing more than the future of his country. He considered, rightly or wrongly, that the Mar Shimun was a danger, and he worked hard and, as already stated, with much success, to weaken his influence. This, however, does not necessarily imply that he was opposed to the Assyrians as a whole. On the contrary, he, like the majority of responsible Iraqi officials, wished to see them become contented citizens of Iraq. In August, he was for a time Political Officer with the Army, and in this capacity carried out his conversations with the French in a very satisfactory manner. Later, it is true, some of his actions at Dohuk were reprehensible, but at that time he was terrorized by the Army, the officers of which openly stated that he was a traitor to Iraq. It would have taken a much stronger man than he was to withstand them, and he was quite unable to prevent the executions at Dohuk. On the other hand, he was almost the only official who on his own initiative did anything to relieve the sufferings of the women and children. And in this, I, personally, found him extremely helpful.

Yacu□s propaganda tours were, perhaps, not definitely illegal, though as he was persuading the Assyrians not to apply for Iraqi nationality and settlement, the last chance of settlement that they would ever have, he was undoubtedly doing them much harm. His habit of moving about with a large armed following was, however, clearly illegal. It is true that in the Kurdish mountains everyone is armed, and a Kurdish Agha would think it beneath his dignity to move about unarmed. But Yacu was not a Kurdish Agha, and yet his following was often

greater than that of any of the big Kurdish chiefs, and as such was likely to lead to a breach of the peace.

The first hint of serious trouble occurred early in May when Yacu came to Dohuk to see the Qaimaqam with an armed following of thirty men. The Qaimaqam was ill and unable to see him, whereupon Yacu wrote a rather insolent letter that he would be unable to come again, as he was occupied by household affairs.

On June 14th an incident of the same kind took place. Major Thomson had two days before passed through Dohuk, and had arranged with the Qaimaqam to see on his return some of the Assyrian leaders in order to explain to them what he was going to try to do in the way of settlement. Among those invited to meet Major Thomson was Malik Ismail. He, however, was ill and had gone to Baghdad. His son, Yacu, came in his stead, and he came with over thirty armed men. Major Thomson, naturally considering this an insult to himself as well as to the Iraqi Government, declined to see him. A few days later it was reported that Yacu had gone to Bageira, a village on the road to Amadiyah. There he had held a series of meetings, for the villagers here belonged to his tribe. It happened that Khoshaba and others of the anti-Mar Shimun party were returning on June 19th from Dohuk to Amadiyah. Reports had been received that Yacu intended to stop the cars in which they were travelling. The Qaimaqam took the precaution of sending two police armed cars as an escort and nothing happened. As a matter of fact, it is improbable that Yacu really intended any violence, but that his activities had angered the pro-Government Assyrians is shown by the following petition which the Mutaserrif, Mosul, received from them a few days later:

> *We the undersigned greatly regret the action of Yacu Malik Ismail who brought 100 armed men on the route of Malik Khoshaba, Malik Chikko, and Malik Zaia, in order to kill them, we now consider these three maliks as already killed. Although prepared to revenge in this hour we do not wish to do what is contrary to the laws and the honour of the Government. We request the Government to punish the defiant Yacu or else we will take our revenge ourselves. We request Government not to blame us.*
>
> *(TWELVE SIGNATURES OF ASSYRIAN MALIKS AND RAISES.)*

Yacu was, therefore, ordered to come in to Dohuk to explain his recent activities. He refused and continued to refuse. Thus a serious situation was reached. Either the Government had to enforce its orders, or it had to abdicate its authority. The situation was aggravated when most of the Assyrians from Bageira and the neighbouring villages took to the mountains.

I can testify that at this time the local Iraqi officials did their utmost to induce Yacu to come in. They failed, as did Major Sargon, the British Inspecting Officer of Police, who went out himself and tried to reason with Yacu. To him Yacu said that he would only come if ordered to by the Mar Shimun. Unfortunately, the Mar Shimun was not helpful. It happened that the Bishop in Jerusalem, Dr. Graham Brown, was in Mosul at this time. He had come on business connected with the Archbishop of Canterbury's Mission to the Assyrians, and, of course, had nothing to do with the Settlement question. I explained to him the situation and pointed out the appalling consequences of any armed conflict with the Government and Yacu's followers. I begged him on his return to Baghdad to use his influence with the Mar Shimun to persuade him to write a letter to Yacu advising him to come in. The Bishop went to Baghdad, but was unable to induce the Mar Shimun to write to Yacu. It would, perhaps, be unfair to say that the Mar Shimun was indifferent to the probability of bloodshed, though it is obvious that he did not realize the danger, as frequently as he and his followers had spoken of the Iraqi Government's intention to massacre all Assyrians, nor did he realize the extent of his responsibilities. Yacu remained obdurate despite every attempt to induce him to come in. The following letter which he wrote showed his frame of mind (the original translation is retained):

1. *He (Yacu) will not go to Dohuk or Simmel, because if he went there his men numbering 200 armed would follow him, he therefore does not wish to affect his reputation by such a gathering.*
2. *He will keep the peace and if Werda Bonadan was released, he would withdraw his armed men from the road.*
3. *He is still obedient to Mar Shimun's orders whether he is in Iraq or elsewhere.*

4. *Malik Khoshaba and his followers are traitors, because they disobeyed the orders of the Mar Shimun; he himself is loyal to Government and more benefit would be derived from him than those traitors*
5. *Qaimaqam Dohuk affected him by restricting the liberty of some of his followers by false reasons, like his imprisoning Werda for saying to Chikko "I'll kill you"; it was clear that his imprisonment by Qaimaqam Dohuk was directed merely against Yacu.*
6. *He executes the orders of the Government; if any offence were to be committed by any of his men, he would arrest the accused and hand him to Government.*
7. *Qaimaqam Dohuk affected his reputation twice when he went to Dohuk, once to meet him and the second time to meet Major Thomson by his orders. On the first time there were with him 8 men and on the second 10. Qaimaqam Dohuk informed the Mutaserrif that there were with him 50 mounted men the first time and 70 the second time, and that without any inquiry being made but solely on the statement of mischief-makers.*
8. *He will preserve tranquillity in order to safeguard his prestige, his name, and his services up till now, and in order not to have his status fall.*
9. *He requests Government not to listen to mischief-makers or to restrict the liberty of his followers, which only increases the anger in his heart and in the hearts of his men; on the contrary, Government should be considerate with them in order that they may serve it.*
10. *The Government had given them liberty. If any of its officials assaulted them on his own account, they would also do the same to him; and they would not regard that as a crime as they are free.*
11. *After the return of Mar Shimun and his decision to stay in Iraq permanently, then the Qaimaqam of Dohuk will see real fidelity.*

REMARKS

After Yacu had signed this paper, he informed the head-constable that he would oppose the Government like a "cat" if the Government wished to put him down.

The situation grew rapidly worse, especially as there were signs of restiveness on the part of the Kurds. On June 25th it was decided that Army troops would have to be concentrated in the Dohuk area. The following reasons alone justified such a step:

1. An overwhelming show of force might persuade Yacu that resistance was hopeless.
2. Such a force might dissuade other Assyrians from joining Yacu - for it was officially announced that any Government action would be directed against Yacu and not against the Assyrians as a whole.
3. The necessity of avoiding anything in the shape of a partial check, for such a check might result in the Kurds becoming out of control, a fear which was always present in our minds.

I must admit that it was with very considerable misgivings that, when consulted by Baghdad, I agreed to the employment of the Army. The Army officers were known to hate the Assyrians and in particular Bekir Sidqi, who was in command in the north, had openly stated what he would do to them if the opportunity occurred. The transfer of this officer had again and again been recommended by the British advisory officials, and, indeed, King Feisal in May promised that it would be immediately carried out. But he nevertheless remained at Mosul, with what tragic results will shortly be recounted.

I decided that as a last hope I ought to go out myself to see if I could bring Yacu in. I was doubtful of success, as I did not know Yacu personally, and Major Sargon, who knew him, had failed. I therefore telephoned to Baghdad asking for permission. I laid down the terms which I should offer him. These terms were exactly the same as Yacu had been offered and had refused during the past ten days. I recommended that the order for me to go out should come from the Minister of Interior himself. My object was that if I failed and blood was later shed the Iraqi Government could show that it had left no stone unturned in its endeavour to bring Yacu in. The Minister agreed to my recommendation and I received the following telegram from the Acting Adviser to the

Ministry of Interior:

> *Minister wishes you to see Yacu as soon as possible if you see no objection and endeavour to persuade him to come in quietly. You are authorized to inform him that Government does not yet consider him criminal, but his recent actions have been such that they require explanation. He is required to come into Mosul to make those explanations. If reasonable, they will be accepted on grounds that misunderstanding has occurred. He will, however, be required to give with suitable guarantee an undertaking for good behaviour in future and that he will not go about with large armed parties.*

The following day I left Mosul before dawn to meet Yacu at an appointed rendezvous in the mountains. As I passed through Dohuk I met Major Thomson, who was on his way back from Amadiyah. I asked him to come with me, as I though he would be able to help me, as indeed he did. At midday we met Yacu. The first sight of the "rebel chief" coming down the mountainside wearing plus fours, a soft hat, and tennis shoes, was not without humour even at that moment. After two hours talk Yacu agreed to come in. Our conversation had been perfectly friendly, though Yacu put forward a number of grievances, which I promised would be investigated at Mosul. According to arrangement I drove Yacu direct to Mosul in my own car. On the way we passed a battalion of infantry on the march and other troops in lorries, who had been sent up to bring Yacu in by force if necessary. Neither of us made any comment. At Mosul Yacu descended from my car complete with rifle and bandolier of ammunition, and we arranged to meet in my office the following morning.

Naturally Baghdad as well as Mosul was relieved at Yacu's surrender, but complications at once arose. The Iraqi authorities thought that this was a good opportunity to relieve the Assyrians of some of their arms. It was proposed to levy a rifle fine on the villages in the Bageira area which had joined with Yacu in defiance of the Government's orders. Such a proposal, of course, was a direct contravention of the terms on which Yacu had surrendered. The imposition of the fine would certainly have

been resisted by force, as the Assyrians had for long been frightened that the Iraqi Government intended to disarm them. Had active hostilities broken out the Iraqi Government would have entered into them in the wrong. What made the Government's case even weaker was the fact that no such fine had been imposed on the Barzanis, who had actively fought against the Iraqi Government for six months the year before, causing many casualties to the troops and heavy expense to the Treasury. Finally the Iraqi Ministers yielded to British advice, but not before it had been made clear to them that Major Thomson and I would at once resign our appointments if any attempt was made to levy a fine on rifles.

Nor was Yacu's attitude at first much more satisfactory. In dealing with Orientals, officials or others, delays are inevitable. The Minister of Interior for some petty personal reasons did not at once approve of the terms of the undertaking which Yacu had to sign. During the interval Yacu told all and sundry that I had never informed him that he would have to sign such an undertaking. This was completely untrue, as I had read out the telegram at least twice, and had even handed it to him to read. Finally, he signed, but with ill grace. Yacu is a fanatical type of man. Brave to a fault in battle, he has not the moral courage to admit when he is wrong in council. He had always been a rather difficult character in the Levies, though he had good qualities as well which made him popular. The following is an example of how difficult he, like most other Assyrians, was to deal with. A few days after he came into Mosul, I thought it would be as well if he and the Qaimaqam of Dohuk made friends. A meeting was accordingly held in the office of the Mutaserrif. The Mutaserrif made a short and most conciliatory speech, saying that everyone wanted to forget what had happened and be good friends in future. The Qaimaqam agreed and said that he was perfectly ready to do so. He asked Yacu to come to see him in Dohuk, so that they could talk things over together. Yacu then asked if he could say a few words. He promptly embarked on a long account of his grievances. The Qaimaqam politely pointed out that this was not a Court of Inquiry, and that he had kept silent regarding his own complaints against Yacu. Thus reconciliation was by no means assured.

Immediately after Yacu's surrender I recommended that a meeting should be held in Mosul of all the Assyrian leaders in order that the Government's policy should be

fully explained to them. It has been remarked earlier that the Iraqi Government must be blamed for its failure to hold such a meeting six months before. Then the atmosphere was generally calmer than in July, when the aftermath of Yacu's adventure and the detention of the Mar Shimun in Baghdad had embittered the feelings of all concerned. Here it is to be noted that it was not until the beginning of July that the Assyrians in Mosul knew definitely that the Mar Shimun was being detained in Baghdad. It has been suggested that Yacu's defiance was, in part, a protest against the Mar Shimun's detention. This was not the case.

The holding of the meeting was approved by the Minister of Interior, and it was held on July 10th. It would have been a great advantage had the Mar Shimun been able to come but, with the temper of the Iraqi Ministers what it now was, it was obviously useless even to suggest that he might return to Mosul for a few days. Apart from him, all the other Assyrian leaders of every shade of opinion were present. In fact more came than had been invited, and the atmosphere in an over crowded room on a particularly hot day became somewhat unpleasant. The meeting was addressed by the Acting Mutaserrif, Major Thomson, and myself. The Acting Mutaserrif dealt with the policy of the Government generally, Major Thomson with the details of land settlement, and I with the prospects of Assyrians who wished to leave Iraq. This last was necessary for two reasons. The Iraqi Government had given an undertaking to the League Council not to place any obstacle in the way of any Assyrian who wished to leave Iraq. On the other hand, it was essential to explain that the Iraqi Government had no power to compel other countries to accept the Assyrians. Quite apart from obtaining permission to leave Iraq, which was easy, permission had to be obtained from the country which it was proposed to enter, and this was by no means so simple. Certain Assyrians have subsequently claimed that I told the meeting that any Assyrian who wished to leave Iraq would and could do so and that those, who a week later left for Syria, were only doing what I told them. This suggestion is ingenuous, but hardly correct. At the second meeting which was held the following day several Assyrians asked how they could leave the country if they desired to do so. The Commandant of Police at some length and in some detail explained the procedure. The procedure certainly did not entail several hundred armed men crossing the frontier in a body and

without the least warning to anyone. The Assyrians have also asserted that the tone of the official addresses at this meeting was so unfriendly that it was clear that the Iraqi Government did not want the Assyrians in Iraq. This assertion is a travesty of the truth. The Mutaserrif's address, in which he explained the Government's policy, was most cordial towards the Assyrians whom, he stated, the Government was most anxious to see living as contented citizens of Iraq. After those addresses had been given the Acting Mutaserrif invited anyone present to ask questions. Many seized the opportunity. The views expressed were sharply contrasted. A number of speakers expressed in no uncertain tone their complete sympathy with the policy of the Government. Two or three others regretted the absence of the Mar Shimun. Among those who attended the meeting uninvited were certain irresponsible young men from Mosul town, who could not possibly be termed leaders. Unfortunately, an inflammatory speech by one of these gate-crashers caused some excitement, and members of the pro and anti-Mar Shimun parties commenced abusing each other. Feeling remained strained until the meeting was adjourned, it being arranged that it should be continued the next morning.

Late that evening the Mutaserrif and I each received a petition with a large number of signatures. It was written in Syriac, so we were unable to read it, but we had a good idea of what it contained, as there had been rumours current that afternoon that the Mar Shimun party intended to refuse to attend the next day's meeting. When the petition was translated the next morning this proved to be the case. I discussed the situation with the Mutaserrif and it was arranged to send for the four most prominent persons who had signed the petition, namely Bishop Yusef, an uncle of the Mar Shimun, Malik Loco of the Tukhuma, Malik Andrias of the Jilu, and Yacu himself. After some conversation they said that the Signatories of the petition were prepared to attend a meeting apart from the other party. They gave as a reason that they feared that there would be trouble, if the two parties met together. In view of the feeling at the termination of the meeting of the previous day, there were some grounds for these fears. It was, therefore, arranged that there should be two meetings, the first for the Mar Shimun's party and the second for the others.

The first meeting passed without incident. Those present, who were about half of all those who attended the previous day, expressed their complete satisfaction with the

Government's policy, their loyalty to the King, and their obedience to the Government. The meeting ended with cheers for His Majesty, the Government, and the Army. I remember well Shemasha Gavriel leading the cheers for the Army, at whose hands he was to meet his death at Simmel exactly a month later.

The second meeting lasted much longer. The atmosphere was, in the absence of the opposition, far calmer than that of the previous day. At first most of the speakers dwelt on the difficulties which they had experienced in regard to their lands. It was clear that they were genuinely concerned about the lack of security in privately owned lands. Nearly all the speakers said that the presence of the Mar Shimun was absolutely necessary if a satisfactory settlement was to be made. It was explained to them that the Mar Shimun was free to return immediately if he signed the simple acknowledgment required from him by the Minister of Interior. The draft of this acknowledgment was read out to them. At the same time it was pointed out to them that the Government was inflexible in its determination not to allow any "temporal" power to the Mar Shimun. The discussion was perfectly friendly and those present acknowledged that they fully understood the policy of the Government, and thanked the Acting Mutaserrif for explaining it. They undertook as long as they were in Iraq to obey all the laws and orders of the Government. They retained, however, the right to consult the Mar Shimun as to whether they should remain in Iraq or not.

After the meeting ended, the Mutaserrif, on my recommendation, requested the four leaders, whose names have been mentioned above, to remain behind. He unofficially suggested to them that they should go to Baghdad and see the Mar Shimun and endeavour to persuade him to sign the required acknowledgment, so that he might return to Mosul and co-operate with Major Thomson in the settlement. It was explained to them that this advice was given to them purely in the interests of the Assyrians themselves. The Government had decided on its policy both as regards the position of the Mar Shimun and as regards land settlement. This policy would be carried out whether the Mar Shimun was in Baghdad, Mosul, or elsewhere. At the same time it appeared that a certain number of Assyrians would not apply for lands until advised to do so by the Mar Shimun. These would suffer irreparable harm. After some conversation the four leaders said that they would think the matter over and that

possibly two of them would take a letter to the Mar Shimun in Baghdad. During the next few days Yacu, Loco, and Andrias saw Major Thomson on several occasions. I purposely did not see them, as I wanted their action to be as unofficial and therefore as spontaneous as possible. Eventually Yacu and Loco said that they had decided to go to Baghdad. They even asked Major Thomson to recommend a hotel. They left Mosul on July 18th. But they did not go to Baghdad.

CHAPTER X: THE SYRIAN ADVENTURE

Instead of going to Baghdad they went to Syria. In Iraq the heat of the summer reaches its highest intensity with the passing of July into August. This, then, was the time of year chosen by the Assyrians for their adventure. Many British officials were on leave, the British Ambassador himself was many hundreds of miles away on the other side of Europe. In the country itself the summer had been an arduous one. This held true, of course, on the other side of the frontier as well, and the heat may perhaps be accepted charitably as an explanation for the peculiar manner in which the local French officials handled the situation.

When Yacu and his friends crossed into Syria, they went first to the French frontier officials at a place near Ain Diwar, a few miles across the border. It appears that they put forward to these officials a request for permission for the Assyrians to enter Syria, on the ground that conditions in Iraq were impossible for them. The French officials telegraphed to Beyrouth to ask for instructions, but unfortunately Beyrouth did not at once inform Baghdad that Yacu and Loco had arrived at Ain Diwar. The French later stated officially that the Iraqi Government failed to keep them informed of what was happening on the frontier, but it should be pointed out that there is a French Consul in Mosul in close contact with the local situation, while the Iraqi Government before July 21st had not the slightest grounds for thinking that the Assyrians intended to move to Syria. On the other hand, it is of interest to note that the Assyrians assert that the Iraqi Government employed strong pressure on the French Mandatory authorities to evict the Assyrians from Syria. The facts are quite otherwise. Actually the Iraqi Government would have been only too pleased if the French had accepted these Assyrians. It was realized that the return of the malcontents to Iraq, even if no immediate trouble occurred, would only unsettle the remainder of the Assyrians. The Iraqi Government considered that it would be well rid of Yacu and his followers.

Yacu and Loco, having put forward their request to the French authorities, did not wait for a reply, but sent word at once to the Assyrians in the villages telling them to cross into Syria. The French, they said, had promised to give lands to the Assyrians and to exempt them from taxation for a period of five years. They also said that the

Iraqi Government intended to disarm the Assyrians at once. Both these statements were entirely false. The Assyrians from most of the Dohuk Qodha moved, and there is no doubt that they had previously been warned to be ready. The Iraqi local authorities, on the other hand, had not the slightest inkling of the intention of the Assyrians, any more than had the British officers of the mutiny of the Levies in June 1932. The first information was received in Mosul on July 20th, and this was to the effect that the Assyrians from most of the Dohuk Qodha had left their villages and that many had concentrated in the mountains above Basirian. Nothing definite was known of their intentions; indeed, it was still thought that Yacu and Loco were in Baghdad. There were, however, rumours that the Assyrians intended to march to Syria, and I personally informed the French Consul of this possibility. He stated that on no account would the Assyrians be allowed to enter Syria. From the Iraqi point of view the departure of the Assyrians to Syria appeared to be the lesser of two evils, even if it did cause complications with the French Mandatory authorities. If the Assyrians remained concentrated in the mountains trouble was absolutely certain. Such a concentration could only mean that the Assyrians were deliberately trailing their cloak in front of the Government, and such behaviour the Government could not possibly ignore.

The situation then began to develop. On the evening of July 21st the Qaimaqam of Zakho reported that large numbers of the Assyrians were crossing the Tigris by the ferry at Faish Khabur, a small Chaldean Christian village on the Tigris some three miles downstream of where the Khabur river enters it from the east, the Khabur here forming the frontier between Iraq and Turkey. This information I communicated at once to the French Consul at Mosul, and on the following day I told him that more had crossed. As was no doubt inevitable, there was great exaggeration of the numbers of those who had gone into Syria, and it was first reported that over 1,500 had done so. Not until much later, actually in the middle of August, was the real number known, namely fewer than 800. The tribes which were represented in the movement were mainly Upper Tiyari, Tukhuma, Diz, and a few Baz and Ashuti.

When the Assyrians moved into Syria they left their families behind in the villages unprotected. This proves two things - first, that they had certainly no warlike intentions; second, with equal certainty they felt no anxiety as to the safety of their women and

children in Iraqi. In this the even proved them to be correct; until the fighting at Faish Khabur on August 4th had completely altered the situation, no instance of the slightest aggression against these Assyrian villages occurred. It is by no means certain that the Mar Shimun himself was informed of Yacu's plan. He himself emphatically denies that he knew anything about it until it had been carried out, but the Iraqi Government is convinced that he knew all about it and approved it. It is at least probable that this movement was part of the plan drawn up the previous summer at the time of the Levies' mutiny, but was at that time not put into effect.

The situation was rapidly becoming more serious. The continued movement of large bodies of armed men about the countryside could not be tolerated, unless the Government was to abdicate its functions. Military forces were therefore sent to the Tigris with orders to allow Yacu's followers to recross the river back into Iraq only on condition that they gave up their arms. The troops which had been sent up to the Dohuk area at the time of the Yacu affair had not yet been withdrawn. The expense of moving them to Dohuk had been considerable, and in order to avoid an entire waste of this money it was decided to allow the troops to remain in that area to carry out the usual summer mountain manoeuvres.

The disposition of the troops near Faish Khabur was as follows:

1. At Dairabun, headquarters of the column, two battalions of infantry, two squadrons of cavalry, one section of mountains artillery. (Dairabun is a small Chaldean Christian village about two miles east of Faish Khabur, lying just below the Jebel Bekhair, a narrow range of mountains, which rise to about 4,000 feet.)
2. At Bashikli Bala (on the main Dohuk-Zakko road, about fifteen miles from Dairabun, to which it is connected by a rough track), two battalions of infantry, two squadrons of cavalry, one section of mountain artillery. (In addition a motor machine-gun company was at hand. It changed its location several times. About 350 police also came under the orders of the O.C. column).

The order that the Assyrians should surrender their arms on their return has been

severely criticized. The Iraqi Government nevertheless had strong reasons for issuing it. The activities of Yacu and this last movement had caused considerable restlessness in the north. Such conduct had to be prevented in future. It was, moreover, the intention of the civil authorities at once to return sufficient rifles to the Assyrians to ensure their self-protection. The Assyrians, man for man, were better armed than the Kurds, though numerically of course they were weaker. A fairer criticism can be directed against the Iraqi authorities on account of their failure to inform the Assyrians clearly enough as to the conditions on which they could return to Iraq. It cannot, however, be disputed that at this juncture the General Government and the local civil authorities were most anxious to minimize the possibilities of a clash. Orders were even issued that any other Assyrians who wished to cross to the right bank should be permitted to do so. Only on July 27th, in consequence of objections on the part of the French authorities, were further crossings forbidden. It was, moreover, impressed on the military that every effort should be made to avoid bloodshed. Nor did any incident occur prior to August 4th, though a certain number of Assyrians on their way to Syria were turned back, and some of them disarmed. These Assyrians had come from the more distant districts such as Amadiyah and Aqra.

In the meantime, on July 23rd and 27th, the Iraqi Government made urgent representations to the French delegation in Baghdad, requesting the immediate application of Articles 5 and 6 of the provisional Agreement for the Regulation of the Affairs of Frontier Tribes in force between the two countries. Under these articles the French were bound to disarm the Assyrians, and remove them some distance from the frontier. Actually, however, it seems rather doubtful whether this agreement could have been taken to cover an extraordinary case of this nature.

There were three other factors, which further complicated the situation. The first was doubt as to the actual frontier between Syria and Iraq. This frontier had been recently delimited afresh by a League of Nations committee. It was uncertain as to when the new frontier was to come into effect. If the old frontier was still effective, the majority of the Assyrians, who were camped in and south of the Wadi Safan, were still in Iraqi territory. The second complication was caused by the almost complete lack of information from French sources. It was not at first definitely known whether the French

would accept the Assyrians or not. Though the Iraqi authorities knew they would almost certainly refuse to do so, it was difficult in the absence of definite statements from the French to convince the Assyrians in Mosul and elsewhere that this was the case. The third factor was the receipt of all manner of garbled and exaggerated reports. These had the result of effectually cloaking the real facts. Apart from untrue reports of the movements of the Assyrians, fantastic rumours were being widely spread regarding the intrigues of the French and the British. The great majority of Iraqis, both officials and others, were firmly convinced that the French were at the back of the whole affair. It was believed that they desired trouble in Northern Iraq, and that they would seize upon it as proof that the abandonment by the British of the Iraqi mandate over Iraq had been premature and as a proof that they could not safely give up their own Mandate over Syria. The British too were attacked. It was reported and believed that a British aeroplane had dropped supplies of ammunition to the Assyrians, that the British Inspecting Officer of Police on his tour of the right bank of the Tigris had visited the Assyrians with instructions as to their future action, and that British officers of the Royal Air Force and Levies were deliberately stirring up the Assyrians against the Iraqi Government. In such an atmosphere it was difficult for anyone to work calmly.

On July 26th a conference was held at Faish Khabur between Iraqi and French representatives. At this the French pointed out that as the new frontier line had not yet come into force the Assyrians were not in Syria at all. This statement was indeed confirmed by the British Inspecting Officer of Police at Mosul, who on July 28th motored up the right bank of the river to find out the true position. They stated, moreover, that they were on no account prepared to accept the Assyrians in Syria. They promised to disarm them if they crossed the frontier.

On July 30th information was received that the French authorities had disarmed a large number of Assyrians. On August 2nd a second meeting was held between the Iraqi and French representatives. I had personally visited that morning Dairabun, where the headquarters of the Army had been established, and had advised the Political Officer, Mekki Beg el Sherbiti, Qaimaqam of Dohuk, as to the points which required to be cleared up. Mekki Beg, incidentally, had with him an assistant political officer, Lazar Effendi, an Assyrian, who was Mudir of Dohuk. Another Assyrian, Ezra, who was an

Assistant Commandant of Police and a man of highest reputation, had been appointed to act as Qaimaqam at Dohuk in the absence of Mekki Beg. It was hoped that these appointments would reassure the Assyrians of the good intentions of the civil authorities. There was, in truth, much that was obscure, as the French had given no information as to the disarmament of the Assyrians. At the Conference, however, the French officer, Captain Lariste, stated:

1. *The Assyrians would not be allowed to remain in Syria, and that they had been told this by a senior French Political officer.*
2. *That the Assyrians had crossed into Syria and had surrendered their rifles (A) of their own accord,*
   (B) unconditionally.
3. *That the number who had crossed into Syria was 415, and that 336 rifles with 13,000 rounds of ammunition had been surrendered. He estimated that about 350 more remained on the right bank in Iraqi territory.*
4. *That as for the frontier, he did not consider that the new boundary came into force until official orders had been received, and such orders had not yet been received.*

Captain Lariste, however, was by no means explicit as to what was to be done with the rifles which had been surrendered to the French. It was vital that the Iraqi authorities should have clear information on this point, for it was now certain that the Assyrians would have to return to Iraq and it was absolutely essential to know whether they would return with their arms or not. Mekki Beg particularly requested Captain Lariste to give him notice if, when the Assyrians were evicted from Syria, they would return with their arms or not. Captain Lariste wrote this request in his pocket book, but most unfortunately took no further notice of it, and when the arms were given back to the Assyrians by the French authorities on the afternoon of August 4th, the Iraqi authorities were not informed.

Though the Assyrians in the event returned to Iraq, fully armed, the news of the surrender of the rifles, which was the last we had heard, greatly eased our minds, and everybody hoped that the affair would be settled without bloodshed. This was

particularly so because it was now known that a considerable number of the Assyrians, who had crossed into Syria, wished to come back. They realized that they had been deceived by Yacu's statements, their eyes having been opened to this by the fact that the French, far from welcoming them, giving them land, and exempting them from taxation, would not have them at all. It was true that Yacu himself and his diehards, mainly of the Tukhuma tribe, still refused to face the hard facts. Yacu, indeed, was saying that he would prevent anyone from surrendering. As a result serious dissensions had arisen among the Assyrians, but as the recalcitrants were in the minority there seemed every hope of a peaceful solution.

It would be as well to sum up the position on August 3rd. The Iraqi Government has published a Blue Book in which its case is fully set out. To judge by this Blue Book the Iraqi Government had an overwhelming case. In fact, an American observer in Baghdad said to me that no Government ever could have such a case. This was true. Nevertheless, though the Government's case was not as strong as the Blue Book represents, it was, in truth, reasonably strong. In the first place, it must be stated that the Iraqis could in no way be held responsible for the previous misfortunes of the Assyrians. They could truthfully say that they had never invited them to come to Iraq. They could hardly be expected to offer them more favourable conditions than those enjoyed by the original inhabitants of the country, be they Arabs, Kurds, Yezidis, or Christians. The Iraqi Government had, on the surface, at any rate, displayed exemplary patience in the face of the exasperating events of the last two months. Mistakes had been made certainly, but few Governments are guiltless of occasional errors of judgment. The Assyrians are, admittedly, a difficult people to handle. They have a veritable genius for irritating even those who are most sympathetic towards them. And the ordinary Iraqi official was hardly sympathetic. At best the Assyrian was held to be a political nuisance, at worst he was considered to be a danger to the State.

The Blue Book naturally laid stress on the arguments in favour of the Iraqi Government. A closer examination of this book will show, however, that the majority of the reports quoted had been written by British advisory officials. Few reports of Iraqi officials were printed. Some of these, of course, were quite sensible, but many were foolish and some even worse. The Assyrians, naturally, were aware of the attitude of

certain Iraqi officials, and some violent articles in the Baghdad Press had increased their suspicions. They did not understand that this attitude on the part of officials was largely the result of their own aloofness. It is, however, only fair to say that up to last summer practically all responsible Iraqis did desire a peaceful solution of the Assyrian question, and wished to see the Assyrians living as contented citizens of Iraq. But their attitude had been changed gradually during June and July 1933. They had grown more and more irritated over what they considered to be the hopeless obstinacy of the Mar Shimun in Baghdad and over Yacu□s behaviour in the north. Many were gradually coming to think that the Assyrian question must be settled once and for all. Most unfortunately, as has been seen a large number of the responsible officials were on leave during the hot weather. King Feisal himself was in Europe, and among the others who were away were Sir Francis Humphrys, the British Ambassador; Sir Kinahan Cornwallis, the very experienced Adviser to the Minister of Interior; and the three ablest of the Iraqi

To return to Faish Khabur. At eight o□clock on the evening of August 4th the Qaimaqam of Zakho telephoned to Mosul the report that the Assyrians had crossed the Tigris into Iraqi territory and had attacked the Army and that heavy fighting was still in progress. It appeared that while the Assyrians on their move into Syria had had to be ferried across the Tigris, they had been able to wade back, as the river, here about two hundred yards wide, had fallen considerably. (Even so, however, the current was still strong and at least two Assyrians were carried away and drowned.)

There was no knowing what might follow this calamity if the news were true. It was hard for us in Iraq to understand how the Assyrians could fight at all, for we did not know until later that in the course of that afternoon the French authorities had returned their rifles to the Assyrians and told them that they must clear out at once. Regrettably, the French took no steps to let the Iraqi authorities know what they had done. It appears, however, that a message from headquarters in Beyrouth was received by the local authorities at Ain Diwar saying that the arms must be returned at once to the Assyrians expelled from Syria. The precipitancy with which the local authorities obeyed these orders without considering the probable consequence is open to sever criticism. This, however, does not mean, as is generally held by the Iraqis to be the case, that the

French acted deliberately in order to cause trouble. Actually, there was no need for the Assyrians to cross the Tigris to return to Iraq. They had only to move a mile or so down the right bank to be in Iraqi country, and territory. Probably they did not realize this, and it is more probable that when the rifles were returned - and here it is to be noted that those who had surrendered their rifles to the French were, for the most part, those who were prepared to surrender to the Iraqis - the Assyrians crossed the river with no other intention than to return to their villages. They realized that they had made a mistake and they were quite willing to accept the terms offered by the Iraqi Government.

The Iraqi Army first heard of the Assyrians return when the headman of Faish Khabur telephoned the Army Commander at Dairabun. It appeared that the Army had neglected to watch the really vital part of the river between Faish Khabur and the Tigris-Khabur confluence, and so did not see the crossing. The headman, a Chaldean Christian, was instructed by the Army Commander to send four men to tell the Assyrians that they must surrender their arms, and at he same time a company of infantry and squadron of cavalry were sent out from Dairabun to intercept the Assyrians. Another mischance occurred here, for not Political Officer accompanied this force. Soon afterwards, rifle and machine gunfire was heard.

It was always difficult to find out who starts fighting, and it is not less difficult on this occasion. Both sides, of course, accuse the other. I have had far more opportunity than anyone else of ascertaining who opened fire, and I have carried out lengthy inquiries, but I must confess that even now I am quite unable to say. The weight of circumstantial and contingent evidence is about equal, for while it was well known that the Army did not intend the Assyrians to escape a second time, as it considered they had escaped by the peaceful conclusion of the Yacu affair, it was also known that Yacu was prepared to go to almost any lengths to prevent the return to Iraq of those Assyrians who wished to surrender. He may have sent someone with the first parties, practically all of whom were certainly crossing with no idea but that of surrender, with instructions to fire a shot, knowing that the Iraqi troops would reply and so prevent the Assyrians from attempting to return to Iraq.

On the whole it seems most likely that the first shot was fired by some excited individual on one side or the other, and this, with the existing tension, was quite

sufficient to bring about a general engagement. Whoever did fire the first shot, heavy fighting at once broke out. The first man killed appears to have been an Iraqi cavalry officer, while the Assyrians were fired on by machine guns, apparently without much effect, whist they were still crossing the river. As more Assyrians reached the left bank their superior numbers gradually drove the Iraqi troops back on to some low hills just beneath the Dairabun camp. When darkness fell about 8 p.m. the firing ceased, but a lorry full of ammunition which had been sent up without escort to the firing line fell into the hands of the Assyrians. Four soldiers in it were killed, and it is alleged that the unarmed driver had his throat cut.

The Assyrians were now convinced that they had been treacherously fired on by the Army. This was quite enough for this hot-headed people. All of them now crossed the river and concerted attack was made on the Dairabun camp. This attack was led by those Assyrians, the Upper Tiyari and the Tukhuma, who had not at first crossed the river, and was directed against the pickets to the east and north of the camp. The attack failed and only one picket was captured. The Iraqi troops appear to have fought quite well, though indeed it would have been disgraceful if, well-armed as they were and in trenches, they had been defeated, even in a night attack. The Assyrians have subsequently claimed that the Army was beaten and demoralized, and that the only reason for the attack not being pressed home was that the troops had taken refuge in the Christian villages of Faish Khabur and Dairabun, and that it was feared that the villagers might be massacred. I have made the most careful inquiries from the only sources which could be considered to be, in any way, impartial, and I have come to the conclusion that these Assyrian accounts are not true. It is more likely that the successful Tukhuma on the left did not push home their attack because they saw that the Tiyari on their right had failed. In any case the capture picket was reoccupied the next morning with the aid of artillery and aeroplanes. The Army did not move out of camp until later in the day. The majority of the Assyrians recrossed the river into Syria unmolested except by aeroplanes, which bombed them. One bomb fell in Syrian territory and wounded two French soldiers besides some Assyrians. The Assyrians, who recrossed the Tigris, 533 in number, are not interned in Syria. Yacu and Loco, the latter of whom was slightly wounded, are among them. A few other Assyrians who had

lost their way were rounded up by the Army during the day and shot out of hand. For on the recapture of the lost picket it was reported that the dead soldiers therein had been burnt and mutilated. Such reports must, of course, be accepted with reserve. Atrocity stories invariably accompany the outbreak of hostilities. In this case they may, or may not, have been true, though it must be admitted that there is nothing in the character of the Tukhuma, the tribe concerned, to suggest that they were impossible. Unfortunately, the Army fully believed all these stories, and this undoubtedly explains the shooting of all prisoners during the next few days. And still more unfortunately these and other atrocity stories, all greatly exaggerated and some entirely unfounded, were published by the Iraqi papers throughout the country, and these enormously inflamed public opinion already sufficiently excited.

At the fighting at Dairabun, the Army lost thirty-three killed, including three officers, and forty wounded. The Assyrians, though they were the attackers, lost considerably less. After the morning of August 5th there was not further of any kind whatever, here or elsewhere. It is necessary to bear this important fact in mind.

CHAPTER XI: THE AUGUST MASSACRES

It is impossible for anyone who was not in Iraq at the time to imagine the state of opinion in the country. The naturally inflammable oriental imagination at once seized upon such news - in the main distorted - as flashed through the country. The Arabs were at boiling-point in their desire to punish the Assyrians. The Christian communities were terrified not knowing what was going to happen and how they might be affected by the ultimate result. Added to this was the Shia unrest of the Lower Euphrates which was disturbing enough to the Government to make them welcome a diversion in some other direction. Since 1920 the country had enjoyed settled rule with the maintenance of law and order in almost every corner, and a generation was growing up not so accustomed as the older men to alarms and excursions of this sort. The extreme nationalists among the Arabs, were, moreover, insistent that Britain was backing the Assyrians in their defiance of the Baghdad Government. They thought that Britain would be only too glad to use some pretext for intervening in the recovery of the country which had so recently become independent. The wildest rumours circulated in all the bazaars, and the feeling, partly political, partly racial, partly religious, was more acute than had been known in the country for many years.

The Arabs were genuinely alarmed by the rumours, greatly exaggerated as it turned out, of the numbers of armed Assyrians who were moving about in the north. It was thought that the Army was being threatened by 1,600 or more armed men, and the Arabs knew well that by their service in the Levies most of these Assyrians were trained soldiers, many of them having held commissioned or non commissioned rank. These fears which were expressed in conversation among the Arabs and in the nationalist newspapers, were a further aspect of the Damnosa Haereditas which had resulted from the first enlistment of the Assyrians as Levies. The fears which the Arabs were everywhere expressing showed remarkably little confidence in the fighting powers of the Iraqi Army, especially as the Army was supplied with motor transport and every other sort of modern equipment. The Arabs indeed had always accepted the Assyrians own estimate of their fighting value; several high Arab officials had told me that one Assyrian was worth three Iraqi soldiers. Moreover, the experience of the Iraqi Army

during the Barzan operations in 1932 had given little ground for confidence. The Army then had been, to put it mildly, severely shaken, and had only been extricated from an extremely awkward situation by the intervention of the British Royal Air Force. Nevertheless, even allowing for the misleading reports, there was no reason for Baghdad to have any fear on the military score. The military position was simple. Even had the troops at Dairabun been defeated by the Assyrians - an extremely unlikely happening - nothing really serious would have occurred, for there was another force of similar strength behind, and if the war had developed in this way, then the Kurds could justifiably have been organized. Further, the Assyrians themselves were so disunited as to make concentrated action impossible. It has been stated publicly in England that had the Assyrian attack on the Dairabun camp been successful a first-class war would probably have followed. I have heard this suggestion rather tentatively put forward by one or two Iraqi officials in their attempts to condone the subsequent excesses, but I have not heard it even hinted at by any British official who knew the real facts. Had the Assyrians been successful, an awkward situation would certainly have arisen, but it is beyond reason to suggest that Assyrians, operating in a hostile country, could have done much more. They must have been anxious as to the safety of their families, which they had left entirely unprotected. This alone would have prevented them keeping together. Had the Iraqi Army been defeated, it was inevitable that the Royal Air Force would have been called in to help against the Assyrians, and the last thing that the Assyrians intended was to fight Great Britain. Indeed, the principal reason why the Iraqi aeroplanes were not fired on when they were dropping bombs at Faish Khabur and when they were flying quite low was because the Assyrians thought that they were British. These aeroplanes were new "Dragons", which the Assyrians did not know that the Iraqi Air Force possessed. I have stressed earlier the point that the Assyrians had, at first, when they crossed into Syria, no warlike intentions whatever. I have also stated that the Assyrians who crossed the river on the evening of August 4th only desired to surrender. It is true that the midnight attack on the Dairabun camp was deliberate. But this attack was made by men of a hot-headed race, who thought that their people had been treacherously fired on. Even in the unlikely event of the Iraqi Army having been defeated and almost annihilated, it is highly improbable that the Assyrians, when they

came to their senses, would have taken any further belligerent action.

I have thought it necessary to write at some length on this subject, in order to explain the psychology of the situation. Behind everything was a black background of fear. Many of the Assyrians genuinely thought that the Iraqi Government had long since planned to massacre them. The Iraqis genuinely considered that the Assyrians were a peril to the young Iraqi State. In any case, for several days there was feeling in Baghdad akin to panic, especially when news was received on August 5th of the restoration of the rifles, which action, inconsiderate as it certainly was, stirred the Iraqis to rage against the French.

Even in the highest circles there was talk of the "rid me of this turbulent priest" order. "Let all the Assyrian men be killed", they cried, "but spare the women and children as the eyes of the world are on us. Let the Arabs and Kurds be raised against the Assyrians. Let trouble be stirred up in Syria against the treacherous French". Saner councils soon prevailed, but there can be no doubt that unofficial and verbal instructions of this nature did reach the Army. And the Army needed little urging on; it obeyed the instructions literally. For some days every male Assyrian encountered was shot. The Arabs and Kurds were raised, as will be related later, and encouraged to loot.

The news of the fighting at Dairabun had another result. It brought about a closing of the national ranks. During the summer there had been serious agitation on the Middle Euphrates, where the tribes fall most easily under the influence of the holy Cities of Kerbela and Nejf. The Shia Arabs have always resented what they consider to be the political and administrative domination of the Sunni minority. During the summer of 1933 one of the periodical waves of agitation was at its height. At the end of June Naji Shawkat Beg, who had been Prime Minister in the last Cabinet, and who is one of the most level-headed politicians in Iraq, passed through Mosul on his way to Istanbul. In the course of a conversation with him I explained the seriousness of the situation in regard to the Assyrians. He replied, "Oh, that is nothing. What really is serious is the Shia unrest. Perhaps you are not aware that two of the provinces on the Middle Euphrates are entirely without Government and the third and most important, Diwaniyah, though it has the best Mutaserrif in the country, is only half under control". But the "Assyrian peril" quickly checked this agitation. Offers of help, perhaps not all of

them very genuine, poured in from all over the country. King Feisal had returned to Baghdad on August 2nd. But how ill he was, was not fully realized. Apart from which he was out of sympathy with certain members of his Cabinet, (See Chapter XIII) who, as already related, had resented his attempts at interference in the matter of the detention of the Mar Shimun in Baghdad.

The civil authorities in Mosul, who on the whole kept their heads fairly well, were enormously handicapped by an almost total lack of information from Zakho. It is true that reports of a kind were received almost hourly, but most of these were so utterly fantastic as to be clearly unreliable. Not even the movements of the Army were known. The Military, in fact, were deliberately doing everything possible to exclude the civil authorities. They knew that these inclined to moderation. They themselves had other views. In this they were assisted by the Qaimaqam of Zakho. This official was a man of the worst type. During the 1920 Arab rising he had been concerned in the brutal murder of certain British Officers at Tel Afar, a town some twenty miles west of Mosul, and had at first been excluded from the subsequent amnesty. He was known to be not only ant-Assyrian, but anti-Christian. Indeed, his reports regarding the entirely harmless Armenians living in his Qodha had caused not a little perturbation during the past year. For this reason he was not appointed Political Officer to the Army, and in revenge he did everything he could to thwart the Political Officer□s work.

If only the civil authorities had known on the evening of August 5th the true facts of the situation, there is no doubt that practically all the subsequent bloodshed could have been avoided. The real position was as follows. After the failure of their attack, the great majority of the Assyrians crossed the river into Syria. A few others were rounded up by the Army near Dairabun and were shot. The remainder, perhaps two hundred in number, moved into the mountains. They had no wish to fight anyone; they had no desire except to get back to their villages as quickly as possible. And on their return it would have been perfectly easy for the police and administrative officials to deal with them. Those who took the route along the Khabur valley mostly managed to get back to their villages. Most of them surrendered later to the police and some of them were sent into Mosul. Here they were detained in prison for a few days and then released. Those who took the more difficult route along the rugged Jebel Bekhair,

which rises to 4,000 feet between the Khabur river and the Tigris plain were not so fortunate. They ran into the pickets of Kurdish tribesmen, which had been organized by the Qaimaqam of Zakho in conjunction with the Army Intelligence officers. The employment of Kurds in this manner was in direct contravention of the orders from Mosul. I had always dreaded what might happen if the Kurds were let loose, and an incident on August 7th in the mountains near the Suwara Tuka, fifty miles from Dairabun, in which two Assyrians had been killed and two others wounded, increased my fears. I represented the danger to the Acting Mutaserrif, who issued urgent orders that Kurds were on no account to be employed except under the strictest control. Unfortunately, these orders were not obeyed.

The Assyrians who had been intercepted by the Kurds were handed over to the Military, who shot them at once. Major Allfrey, who, as a member of the British Military Mission, had been appointed liaison officer to the column at Dairabun, (by a most unfortunate mischance he was absent on the night of August 4th-5th) came across the bodies of fifteen Assyrians, who had obviously been shot in cold blood. He taxed Bekir Sidqi with this, who admitted that these executions had been carried out as a retaliation against the atrocities committed by the Assyrians at Dairabun. Bekir Sidqi had before this realized that the presence of Major Allfrey with the troops was an obstacle to his designs. He ascertained that Major Allfrey's instructions were to remain with him. He made several attempts to escape such unwelcome attentions, but, failing, decided to come into Mosul himself. He knew that this plan would be carried out in his absence, especially as he had given strict orders that any other British officer sent out was to be boycotted. Fortunately, he turned down a suggestion that Major Allfrey should be "accidentally" shot. It may be stated here that Bekir Sidqi spent some time at Belgaum Senior Officer's School in India, and had, in the past, been generally liked by the officers of the British Military mission. The other officers concerned had also served in close association with the British for some time, and had thanked the British armed forces for getting them out of their difficulties in the Barzan fighting of the year previously. Yet in August 1933 the Iraqi Army - or at any rate, that portion of it in the north - was intensely anti-British, and a special flavor was given to the slaughter of the Assyrians because they claimed to be the friends of the British and had loyally served them.

The Tragedy of the Assyrians

The strange story of Suleiman Nejm will show what the general feeling was like at this time. Suleiman Nejm was an Arab of some standing in Mosul, and he was thought by the Iraqi Army to be a British spy. As a matter of fact, he had for many years been a general source of information on frontier affairs, regarding which he possessed unequalled knowledge. During the 1933 re-delimitation of the Iraqi - Syrian frontier, for instance, he had given valuable information to the League of Nations Commissioners. Later still he had brought news, inaccurate as it proved, regarding the number of Assyrians who had crossed the Tigris, but for some quite unfounded reason he was suspected by the Army. At the request of the Ministry of Defence, the Minister of Interior, without consulting the local authorities at Mosul, ordered that he should be arrested and handed over to the Army. Such an order was, of course, entirely illegal, but it was carried out. Suleiman Nejm was shot by Hajji Ramadhan himself (Bekir Sidqi's second in command), with the words "I saw much pleasure in shooting you as you are a spy of the British". Let it be noted, that the British are Allies of Iraq, and the British Royal force had saved the Iraqi Army from destruction the previous summer.

By August 7th it became evident that throughout Zakho Qodha and most of Dohuk as well the civil authorities had lost control of the situation. Though no reports had yet been received of the shootings of prisoners, I knew sufficient of the attitude of the Army to be seriously alarmed, and my fears were greatly increased by the reports received on August 8th that Assyrian villages were being looted. Unfortunately, owing to the excited state of Mosul itself I was unable to leave the town. The least incident might have brought about serious trouble there. The British Inspecting Officer of Police, Major Sargon, had been the object of violent attacks instituted by the Army. The value of his work was, in consequence, greatly lessened. On August 8th he was removed from Mosul to Baghdad on the nominal grounds that his life was in danger, but actually because he was not trusted by his Iraqi colleagues, and because it was thought that he might, if he went into the Army zone, find out what was happening. I objected strongly, but I was not supported. I reported to Baghdad the gravity of the situation from the civil point of view, and it was arranged that the Minister of Interior, Hikmet Beg Suleiman, should come to Mosul as soon as possible. Unfortunately, he arrived too late.

On August 7th the Minister of Defence, Jelal Beg Beban, and the Director-

General of Police, Subih Beg Nejib, arrived at Mosul, but neither of these two individuals were likely to have a calming effect. Jelal Beg belonged to a famous Kurdish family, and to this rather than to any inherent merit or ability he owed his position. He had no control whatever over the Army, and the real object of his coming to Mosul (as I subsequently learnt) was to raise the Kurds all over the north. In this, happily, he was by no means successful. Subih Beg was an ex-Army officer, who had been for a year attached to a British regiment in England. He was an extremely self-opinionated type, and was known to hate the Assyrians. At the time of the Yacu affair I had to request the Minister of Interior to check his exuberance. Subih Beg had now been instructed by the Cabinet to enlist irregular police. In the course of the next few days upwards of one thousand were enlisted, among them over one hundred Assyrians from the northern districts of Amadiyah, where there had been no trouble. All these irregular police were armed and some were put in uniform. Here it must be said that, contrary to the reports which appeared at the time in the English Press, these irregular police behaved quite well. They may not have done much positive good, but they were guilty of no serious outrages.

Although in actual fact nothing remained by August 8th but a few small parties of Assyrians trying to get back to their villages, the reports which were being received painted a very different picture. It was, for instance, reported that large forces of rebel Assyrians were concentrated in the mountains above Basirian and above Dohuk. Arrangements were even made to accept the surrender of the former, though the dispatch of two private soldiers to get in touch with them was hardly the action which British officers would have taken under such circumstances. Many of these reports were spread maliciously by the Army Intelligence officers to cloak the killing which the Army had in view, while the Iraqi Air Force in its first operation seldom failed to bring back inaccurate information. (For instance, the pilots reported on August 9th that Ziwa, a Kurdish village not far from Dohuk, was being attacked by Assyrians and that the attackers had been bombed. It was later ascertained that the Kurds of this village had never even seen an Assyrian, and that one of the Iraqi bombs dropped had killed a Kurdish woman and wounded her husband.)

>From August 5th to 9th an Army detachment swept the Jebel Bekhair, suffering

severely from heat and thirst in doing so. Here and there in the mountains they came up with fugitive Assyrians, and every Assyrian they caught they shot out of hand. Clearly by now the Army had definitely decided that the Assyrians, as far as possible, were to be exterminated. No pretence was made that these operations had any purely military objective, for the Army Intelligence officers did not even take the trouble to cross-question the captured Assyrians, who were simply shot as they were rounded up. Whoever may have issued the orders, if any orders were issued at all, it was evident by now that the Army Command was quite certain in its own mind that, in its decision to wipe out the Assyrians, it would, in the ultimate issue, be backed not only by Arab public opinion, but by the Baghdad Government.

In various villages the civil authorities were found helping the military in their policy of massacre - for massacre it had now become. >From the 7th onwards shooting had been going on at Dohuk and Zakho. (In Dohuk there lived an American missionary, Mr. Cumberland, and his wife. A man of highest character, he was greatly respected by the local officials and by the Kurds. On August 17th he was ordered to leave Dohuk - his wife had already left on the outbreak of the troubles. He was accused of using his philanthropic and religious work as a blind for political activities. Such an accusation was absurd. Mr. Cumberland a few months before had greatly annoyed the Assyrians by an outspoken article in an American magazine, in which he had pointed out that all the alleged grievances of the Assyrians were not in fact well founded. Even in the case of Mr. Panfil, another American missionary living in Mosul, where the Iraqis had perhaps more grounds for suspicion as he was in close touch with the family of the Mar Shimun, there was not the slightest grounds for considering that he was actively intriguing awkward for the military authorities, and it was they and not the civil authorities who had him removed). On the 11th came the dreadful massacre at Simmel, and for the 13th an even worse massacre was planned by the Army to take place at Alqosh. At Dohuk there was only a small force of the Army, but the Intelligence officers rode roughshod over all the constitutional law of the country, for they had been arresting Assyrians without informing the civil authorities - a procedure which was wholly illegal as martial law had not been proclaimed. The worst feature of the shooting at Dohuk was that these wretched Assyrians were entirely innocent of complicity in Yacu□s operations. It

was enough for the Arab officers that they were Assyrian. What happened during those dreadful days is now clear. Evidence has been taken from survivors and in particular from women. The Assyrian women make good witnesses. They are stolid and unemotional - even Boeotian in their heavy unimaginativeness. The Assyrians in Dohuk were taken away a short distance from their village in lorries in batches of eight or ten, and were then turned out of the lorries and shot down with machine guns. On at least one occasion the heavy armoured cars were driven over the dead and dying alike. This brutality would appear incredible were it not to be eclipsed by what was yet to come. The numbers killed in and around Dohuk appear to have been about eighty, although the Assyrians naturally put them much higher. In any case a reign of terror existed in the village for several days. Many families were left without fathers and sons; in some cases bodies remained unburied, but, bad as the situation was, it was nothing to what was to happen at Simmel on August 11th.

During these days we in Mosul heard all kinds of conflicting rumours coming into the town. It was not easy to sift and test them all, particularly as a number of the junior officials of the civil administration, who were working hand and glove with the Army, were vitally interested in suppressing the truth. On August 11th the Minister of Interior, Hikmet Beg Suleiman, arrived in Mosul, having made the journey from Baghdad in a British Royal Air Force plane. On that day had occurred the shameful massacre at Simmel, but we were not to know of this until four days later.

Hikmet Beg Suleiman was more of a Turk than an Arab. He had served with the Turkish Army during the war, and was the brother of Shevket Beg, who had been one of the Leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress at Constantinople in 1908. Hikmet Beg had kept his head better than most of his colleagues during the recent excitement in Baghdad, and his first steps on his arrival in Mosul were, in view of what the situation was thought to be, eminently sound. He arranged for aeroplanes to drop printed messages in the Assyrian country stating that the Government forces would take no action during the next sixty hours, during which time any Assyrians who wished might surrender. On the same evening he held a meeting of the leading Christian dignitaries of Mosul, at which he begged them to do their utmost to get in touch with the rebels in order to induce them to surrender. The results at first seemed satisfactory, for on

August 13th it was reported that 180 had surrendered their rifles at Alqosh, and only later was it ascertained that these 180 were not the rebels whose concentration in the mountains above the town had been - incorrectly - reported, but were merely Assyrians from looted villages near by who had come into Alqosh for protection.

On the next day Hikmet Beg left for Dohuk and Amadiyah, and his influence was sufficient to put a stop to the shootings at Dohuk which have been described above.

I was sitting in my office on the morning of August 15th when Hikmet Beg returned. He came straight into my room in a state of collapse, for he had just come from Simmel, and even he, cynical Turk as he was, had been overcome by the horrors which he had seen. On the previous day I had received reports that there were large numbers of Assyrian women and children in Simmel living in a state of starvation, but not a word had been said in these reports about the massacre which was the cause of this destitution, although there were other vague reports that a large number of Assyrians had been killed by the Kurds and the Irregular police - that the Army were responsible was not mentioned in any of these reports - in the mountains near Dohuk. These reports had induced me to write, on the evening of August 12th, an urgent private letter to the Acting Advisor to the Minister of Interior, with a request that he should show it at once to the British Chargé d'Affaires. I had reported by telephone during the day the plight of the women of Simmel, and the Prime Minister himself telephoned to Hikmet Beg at Amadiyah instructing him to visit Simmel and see for himself what could be done for the women. So Hikmet Beg went there knowing nothing of the horror that awaited him.

When Yacu's expedition went into Syria, the Assyrian villages remained untouched for several weeks, but on August 8th some Tukhuma villages, whose able-bodied men were in Syria, had been looted by Kurds from the Zakho qodha, without doubt encouraged by the Qaimaqam. When the Kurds started looting the women and children fled to Dohuk and Simmel. None of them appeared to have been seriously molested, though personal ornaments and such things were in some cases stolen. The Assyrians then began to realize what was afoot. During the next two days the Arab tribes from the right banks of the Tigris started to cross the river. Their intention was obvious. They themselves admitted that they were out for loot and they claim that they

had been told what to do. Nor was this claim entirely unjustified, as the first wild cries from Baghdad suggesting the raising of the tribes against the Assyrians had reached the Arab tribesmen of the Shammar and the Jubur. In their alarm the Assyrians left their villages and fled to Simmel.

Simmel is on the main road to Zakho, about eight miles from Dohuk, under the administration of which qodha it came. It was the largest village in the neighbourhood and consisted of over one hundred Assyrians and ten Arab houses. The total population would have been about 700, most of the Assyrians belonging to the Baz tribe, with others of the Upper Tiyari and the Diz. The headman was a strong supporter of the Mar Shimun and with fifty others had followed Yacu into Syria. These fifty were almost entirely Tiyari, hardly any of the Baz being among them. The feeling of unrest in the village increased. On August 8th the Qaimaqam of Zakho appeared with a lorry full of soldiers. No satisfactory answer has yet been given to the question why he should have come with troops into a district that was outside his administration. He entered the village and told the Assyrians to surrender their rifles, as he feared that fighting might occur between the rebel Assyrians and the Government forces, in which case the people of Simmel would be less likely to be involved if they had no rifles. Plausibly, but with lies in his heart, he assured them that they would be safe under the protection of the Iraqi flag which flew over the police post - for Simmel, being a large village, had a police post of one sergeant and four men. The Assyrians then handed in their arms, which were taken away by the troops.

Next day more troops returned, this time without the Qaimaqam, and disarmed further Assyrians who in the meantime had come in from the surrounding villages. The following day, the 10th, passed comparatively quietly. Nothing happened except that Arabs and Kurds could be seen looting neighbouring villages. They even came in and stripped the communal threshing floors on the outskirts of Simmel, where the cut barley and wheat was stacked in piles, for it was full time of harvest and the villagers were engaged in threshing and winnowing. The unarmed Assyrians could do nothing and the police did not intervene; they explained that they had no orders and that in any case their numbers were insufficient.

It was becoming quite clear now to the Assyrians what was likely to happen. Not

only had they seen this looting going on, but they suddenly found they were forbidden to draw water form the village spring, being permitted only to go to the main stream, which was dirty. They knew that the Army had already shot many Assyrians. They had seen their head priest, Sada, taken out of Simmel. All day they watched the looting Arabs and Kurds. Not one of them dared to move from the neighbourhood of the police post, except one or two whose houses were near by, and who went to and fro on pathetic household tasks such as the making of bread, the last meal that many of them were destined to eat. They were now in a state of deadly fear, and they spent that night in and around the police post, which is built on a small hill. They now knew only too well the sentiments which the Arabs, and particularly the Arab Army, harboured towards them, and in the small hours of the 11th, when the moon had risen, the watching Assyrians began to observe their Arab neighbours of the village starting away driving their flocks before them. This opened their eyes beyond possibility of error. They realized the trap they had been led into and they knew that they were entirely helpless.

The police sergeant ordered the Assyrians from the outlying villages to return to their homes. When they refused, saying that it was unsafe, he ordered them to leave the police post and go down to the houses in the villages below. They obeyed reluctantly. Some went to the house of Gavriel and his brother Tinan, who kept ressuring them that they would be safe and that the Government would protect them. As others were going down to the houses they suddenly saw lorries of troops and armoured cars arriving. Looking around to the police post they saw a policeman pulling down the Iraqi flag, which until then had been flying, as it had flown for years, as a symbol of the law and order under which every inhabitant of Iraq could live in safety and security. Suddenly and without the least warning the troops opened fire upon the defenceless Assyrians. Many fell, including some women and children, and the rest ran into the houses to take cover. Not a soul was to be seen in the streets. The troops well knew that there was not a rifle or revolver left in the village. An officer then drove up in a car and the troops came in. This officer has since been identified as Ismail Abawi Tohalla, who comes of a well-known but by no means respectable Mosul family. He shouted to the soldiers not to kill the women and children. These were ordered to come out of the houses and go up to the police post. Many did so.

A cold-blooded and methodical massacre of all the men in the village then followed, a massacre which for the black treachery in which it was conceived and the callousness with which it was carried out, was as foul a crime as any in the bloodstained annals of the Middle East. The Assyrians had no fight left in them partly because of the state of mind to which the events of the past week had reduced them, largely because they were disarmed. Had they been armed it seems certain that Ismail Abawi Tohalla and his bravos would have hesitated to take them on in a fair fight. Having disarmed them, they proceeded with the massacre according to plan. This took some time. Not that there was any hurry, for the troops had the whole day ahead of them. Their opponents were helpless and there was no chance of any interference from any quarter whatsoever. Machine gunners set up their guns outside the windows of the houses in which the Assyrians had taken refuge, and having trained them on the terror-stricken wretches in the crowded rooms, fired among them until not a man was left standing in the shambles. In some other instances the blood lust of the troops took a slightly more active form, and men were dragged out and shot or bludgeoned to death and their bodies thrown on a pile of dead.

Gavriel, who has been mentioned in an earlier chapter (See Chapter IX) as the individual who raised cheers for the Army at the Mosul meeting of July 11th, went out to plead for the Assyrians. He explained who he was, and said that his nephew, Ezra Effendi, had long been an officer in the Iraqi police. He showed his nationality papers, but these were torn in pieces before his face and he was shot in cold blood. A priest named Ismail who had taken refuge in the police post was driven out by the police, a rope was tied round his neck and he was kicked down the steps and dragged away by the troops, who shot him, afterwards throwing his body on the steadily growing heap of corpses. Whilst this organized slaughter was going on, the police sergeant, who had from the beginning taken a leading part in the diabolical plot, ordered the Assyrian women to clean up the blood from the neighbourhood of the police post. The women complied, but only for a time. Suddenly they rebelled against this inhuman order and told the police sergeant to turn the machine guns on them as they would rather die. The soldiers then took the men that remained down to a ditch and went on killing until every man was dead. It was then discovered that a few men had taken refuge among the

women and that some of them had hastily got into women's clothes. These were rounded up and murdered.

When there was no one left to kill, the troops took their departure. This was about two p.m., and they went off to Aloka for their midday meal and afternoon siesta. As soon as the troops had gone, the tribes, who had been interested spectators, came in and completed the looting of the houses which the soldiers had commenced. The tribes had taken no part whatever in the massacre, but as the Army were equipped with modern machine guns and had no opposition, there was of course no need for any help. Later in the evening the troops came back for the police sergeant had reported by telephone that a number of Assyrian men had appeared at the police post and taken refuge there. These were hunted out and killed. The shooting went on until about sunset. In the meantime the other houses in the village were crowded with weeping, terror-stricken women and small children. Few of them had any meal that night or for the next few days, for what grain there was in the village had been removed by the Kurds, who had also gone round the houses removing cookery utensils, bedding, and in some cases even the roof beams.

Next morning the women already distracted beyond all reason, had a further shock when they saw the Army returning, for they did not know what this might portend. The Army, however, had merely come back to bury the dead. The bodies were collected and placed in a shallow ditch. It must be remembered that the month was August with a daily sun maximum of 160 degrees Fahrenheit. According to the military report 305 men, four women, and six children were buried. Many of the killed were a little more than half-grown boys. Some other twenty women and children were wounded. I myself saw later one child who had been shot in both wrists as he was being held in the arms of his father who was killed. That night and the subsequent nights some of the women were raped by the police sergeant and the soldiers. Doing everything possible to minimize what had happened, the Arabs have stated that no such incidents occurred. This is a lie. All that can be said is that throughout these terrible days there were fewer outrages on women than would have been expected. It was also everywhere stated at the time that this massacre was the work of the tribes and the irregular police. This, too, is a lie. It was the work of the Iraqi Army, disciplined troops

under the direct command of their officers, the troops responsible for practically all the killing being the motor machine-gun detachments, while other troops who were passing the village throughout the day did nothing to stop what was going on.

Bekir Sidqi himself, who was to be acclaimed by the Baghdad mob as a conquering hero, and - what was even worse - was later decorated and promoted by the Iraqi Government, was not in Simmel but spent that day in Mosul, though there is not question but that he planned the whole affair. Indeed, it was subsequently admitted that the Army, had it not been prevented, had intended to carry out a similar massacre of Alqosh, and that the reports that the Assyrian rebels had entered that village had been deliberately spread about to afford an excuse.

The burial in the shallow ditch, which was carried out most inefficiently, caused the stench under the burning sun to become almost unendurable, and every fly and pestilential insect for miles around was drawn to the village. In this unspeakable atmosphere there lived for six days, one thousand terrified women and children who had seen all their male relations killed before their eyes. All they had to eat was a few dried watermelon seeds and they had scanty water. Even at night they had little sleep, for they did not know what might be coming next, and their dreadful experiences led them to put little trust in the protestations of the police that they were quite safe and that nothing more would happen. A little bread was sent from Dohuk, but nothing on an adequate scale was done until Hikmet Beg Suleiman himself on the 15th arrived in the village and was overcome by what he saw. As soon as he returned doctors and sanitary men were sent to Simmel, and the bodies were decently and properly reinterred. When I visited Simmel myself with Major Thomson on August 17th few traces could be seen of what had occurred, but the sight of the women and children is one which I shall never forget - and I spent more than three years in the trenches in France! That day the women and children were removed to Dohuk, and thence, as there was no proper accomodation, to Mosul, where they were placed under canvas in a camp, which will be described later. Every effort was made to hush up what had occurred and a censorship for a time imposed on out-going letters. It was soon seen, however, that the killing could not be kept secret, for the Christians in the north had sent the news abroad, and in the nature of things an affair of this kind was bound to get out.

In fact, the details were published in the Beyrouth newspapers before they were known in Mosul. So the Baghdad Government began to admit that there had been a slaughtering of the Assyrians, but they threw the blame on the tribes and the Irregular police. Later this was found to be useless, and Yasin Pasha, the Iraqi delegate to Geneva, had to admit that the excesses had been committed by the regular Army. The Pasha went on to add that the excesses merited and had received severe condemnation. This was untrue. Actually the troops were given triumphal receptions when they returned to Mosul, Kirkuk, and Baghdad. In Mosul the Crown prince, who is now King of Iraq, at a great military review, decorated with his own hands the colours of the troops who had been engaged against the Assyrians. Bekir Sidqi, Hajji Ramadhan, and the other officers concerned were promoted. Bekir Sidqi on his arrival in Baghdad motored through the crowded streets amidst enthusiastic applause, sitting on the right hand of the Prime Minister. However much Iraqis may deplore what occurred - and in private many express a genuine disgust - no one of them has yet stated publicly in Iraq that the Army had behaved itself otherwise than well.

But though the worst massacres of all took place at Simmel, this was not the only place were the Assyrians were murdered. The killings at Dohuk have already been described, and many also were shot at and near Zakho. The first reports regarding the number of Assyrians killed were greatly exaggerated; two thousand was a figure often mentioned, and few people, even Iraqis, suggested less than one thousand. Actually, as the result of careful inquiries, I have come to the conclusion that not more than six hundred lost their lives. The great majority of these were peaceful cultivators, who had committed not the smallest offence against the Iraqi Government. Altogether upwards of five hundred and fifty Assyrians were killed by the Army, of whom not more than twenty could, by any stretch of the imagination, be said to have been killed in action. The Kurds, as a whole, behaved considerably better than might have been expected, especially in view of the undoubted encouragement they had received. Only at two places were they guilty of murder, though they did much looting. At a place named Savora the followers of Nisham Agha murdered twelve Assyrians in cold blood. At Qalla Badri, near Dohuk, some Assyrian women were killed and mutilated under atrocious circumstance. Other Assyrians in other places were killed by the Kurds in the

course of their robbing and looting, but probably Kurds did not kill more than fifty altogether. On the other hand, several instances were reported of Kurds protecting Assyrian women and children. Mohammed Agha of Germawa, in particular, showed a fine spirit.

The Arab tribes, though intent on loot, did no killing at all. The Civil officials, with the exception of Abdul Hamid Dabuni, the Qaimaqam of Zakho, behaved reasonably well under circumstances of extraordinary difficulty, though it is true that some were weak and that in places they were terrorized by the Army. The Qaimaqam of Amadiyah, Majid Beg, kept order in his qodha, where, perhaps, an outbreak was more to be feared than anywhere else. He succeeded in gaining the entire confidence of the Assyrians, who are numerous in that district. The Qaimaqam of Aqra, Zibar, and Rowanduz, were, in easier circumstances, equally successful.

The police were generally quite useless, and this was largely owing to the incompetency, if not worse, shown by the Director - General of Police himself, as before his arrival in Dohuk, the Commandant of Police had made some efforts to maintain order. Nevertheless, the police were guilty of few actual crimes. I heard of two Assyrians being shot by them at Dohuk, but that was all. Even the Irregular police, though rather useless, committed no serious excesses other than a little looting. Some of the police inspectors were bullies, but nothing more than that. The sergeant at Simmel was the exception. He was a Kurd and an old Turkish gendarme. He had, no doubt, taken part in many massacres of Armenians and understood the routine. The Assyrian women testify that the other police constables at Simmel did their utmost to help them though naturally they could not do much. The infamous police sergeant, it may be mentioned, was still at Simmel at the beginning of November 1933. He had taken large sums of money from the Assyrian women, but nothing has been recovered. He is now rich enough to retire if he wants to do so.

Thus ended the first military □operations□ of the independent kingdom of Iraq. Had it not been for two things all would have gone well, even after the fighting at Dairabun. The first was the short period when heads were lost in Baghdad. The Arabs, particularly in the Press, are apt to be hot-headed and intolerant on political issues so acute as that of the Assyrians had become. There is no doubt, as has been explained,

that the Arabs were afraid of the Assyrians and were anxious to see strong measures taken against them, and intensely relieved when these succeeded, even if most of them were appalled to learn what the Army had done.

The second was the deliberate brutality of the Army, which enabled the strong measures against the Assyrians to succeed in a way and to a degree which not even the most bloodthirsty politician in Baghdad had anticipated. The Iraqi Army's callous brutality can never be forgiven. From the Iraqi point of view it was disastrous, and the Government in Baghdad, bowing to the strength of public opinion, found itself unable to take the one step that would have put it right in the eyes of the civilized world; namely, the punishment of the individuals responsible. Up to August 4th the Iraqi Government had an excellent case, but this case was completely destroyed by what happened in Simmel and elsewhere. The massacres have blackened the good name of Iraq for many years to come.

CHAPTER XII: THE LOOTING OF THE VILLAGES

The looting of the Assyrian villages which was certainly not discouraged by some of the Iraqi authorities resulted in a total estimated loss to the Assyrians of at least 60,000. Sixty villages were looted and completely or partially destroyed. Even in the partially destroyed villages it was impossible to get the economic life of the place going again without considerable difficulty. How and when these serious financial losses are to be made good and by whom will be discussed in Chapter XIV.

It is important to note that there was no single act of of aggression against the Assyrian villages until August 8th, by which time the Army Command had clearly made up its mind to carry out its organized extermination of the Assyrians. Even the defenceless villages of the men who had gone into Syria with Yacu had not been touched. The first lootings were directed against the Tokhuma villages (Basirian, Girfil, Sarshor, and Dari) which lie up against the mountains northeast of Simmel. The attackers were Kurds(from the Gulli, Sindi, and Slaivani tribes) who had undoubtedly been encouraged by the Qaimaqam of Zakho and certain military officers. During the next day, the 9th, continual reports were received of Arab tribes from the right bank crossing the Tigris. These tribes were mainly the Jubur and the Hadadiyin, and elements of the great Shammar tribe followed later. At first it was possible to stop serious encroachments in the Simmel neighbourhood, and the Commandant of Police did good work in the area, though he was on several occasions obliged to open distant machinegun fire on the raiders. On August 9th, however, the Firector-General of Police assumed direct control. His dispositions of the now numerous police and his general apathy and incompetence were such that no further serious attempts were made to put a stop to the looking. The rank and file of the police were only likely to act if a strong personal lead was given, and this was just what was lacking. A senior R.A.F. officer on August 11th, who happened to be motoring along the Dohuk-Mosul road, saw large numbers of Arabs crossing the road carrying loot from the Assyrian villages. Police cars were moving up and down the road all the time, but displayed no apparent interest in what was taking place. On August 11th sections of the Shammar crossed the river. These Shammar had the year before suffered very heavy losses among their sheep

owing to a rainless winter, and were not unnaturally eager to seize such an opportunity of replenishing their flocks. They raided the villages south of Dohuk, villages which, like those west of Simmel, had taken no part whatever in Yacu□s Syrian adventure. Still further south, towards Alqosh, the Tai Arabs joined in the looting, and they were helped by the Kurds descending from the hills and by the Yezidis. The action of the Yezidis was particularly despicable. They too, were a minority. They often lived in the same villages as the Assyrians and had been on quite good terms with them. Higher up in the mountains it was the Kurds who did the looting. The followers of Sheikh Nuri el Brifkani, a religious leader an a Deputy in Parliament, were the worst of all. The Assyrians here lived in several villages owned by Sheikh Nuri. When the troubles commenced they came to him and asked him for protection, which was promised but not given. The ordinary tribal rules of behaviour were ignored and Sheikh nuri□s followers looted the entire villages. They drove the Assyrians, men, women, and children away, in some cases handing over the men to the Army, by whom they were duly shot. T he other deserted villages on the Dohuk-Amadiyah road were also looted as the days passed. In all there were sixty-four Assyrian villages in Dohuk and Sheikan qodhas. Of these sixty were looted. Four others in Amadiyah qodha were also looted, but here the Qaimaqam, an exceptionally able official, prevented further trouble. The more distant villages in Aqra, Zibur, and Rowanduz escaped unscathed. The looting did not end in the Alqosh (Sheikhan) area until August 14th, when the Commandant of Police showed praiseworthy energy, though he had again to make use of the police Lewis guns and caused some casualties among the Arab raiders. It was indeed time that the looting should cease, as there was every indication that the Arabs, in this undreamed-of opportunity, would next attack the large Chaldean Christian villages, which are dotted about the plain. As it was, two of them did share the same fate as their Assyrian neighbours, and at one of them the headman was killed, shot through the head, though his death was subsequently reported by the Acting Civil Surgeon at Mosul to have been due to concussion following a fall.

Naturally the degree of looting varied considerably. Some villages were entirely burnt out, in a number of others the houses were destroyed by the removal of the wooden roof beams. The wooden doors were nearly everywhere carried off. Practically all the

household effects were lost except the more portable, in the cases where the Assyrians had some warning and were able to flee before the raiders arrived. About two-thirds of the livestock and practically ally the grain on the threshing floors and in the village stores were lost, making, as already stated, the cash losses of the Assyrians hardly less than £50,000, and possibly much more. As with those massacred, those who suffered most by looting were entirely innocent Assyrians, who had taken no part in the Yacu adventure, and who had committed no offence whatever against the Government. As with the massacres, every attempt was made to conceal the true state of affairs. On August 27th the English newspapers published the following telegram dispatched by the Iraqi Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Iraqi Minister in London:

> *There was some trivial looting in several villages evacuated by the families of the rebels, but the Government restored the stolen goods to their owners and indemnified the people whose property it was impossible to recover. There is no truth in the report of the burning of villages, but a few insignificant out-breaks of fire occurred in deserted villages. The whole damage does not exceed a few pounds in each village.*

When I read this remarkable telegram I pointed out to the Acting Mutaserrif in Mosul that it hardly represented the real facts. He agreed, but said that it was good propaganda. I replied that propaganda of this nature, which was sure to be found out sooner or later, was likely to do more harm than good. Unfortunately, the Iraqis have become far too fond of such propaganda, and they do not realize how transparent it is. The local officials followed the lead of Baghdad. Every possible effort was made to show that no serious damage had been done, and that the Assyrian claims for damage were greatly exaggerated. I have not the least doubt that some of the claims were exaggerated. Even in England like claims would be. But to suggest that no damage at all was done was ridiculous. Every tour of inspection that I made showed this. My tours of inspection, of course, were resented by the Iraqi officials, but they could not be altogether stopped. These officials, especially in Sheikhan, were extremely callous. In Sheikhan the Qaimaqam as well as the Mudir of Alqosh, were Christians. They were both terrified out their lives while the looting was going on, and kept all their police at

headquarters in order to protect themselves. I am afraid that it must be admitted that local

Christian administrative officials in a Moslem country can do little good. The best type of Christian does not seek such appointments. Those who do are anxious to say, and do only what they think will please their superiors. in Amadiyah a Moslem Qaimaqam was able to recover most of the loot. In Dohuk the situation was admittedly difficult, as most of the men from the looted villages were either dead or in Syria, and there was no one to give the loot to even if it was recovered. But here and in Sheikhan, where all the men remained, considerably less than 5 percent of the loot has been recovered, and this though it is known where much of it is. Of course, it was difficult to order people to return loot when a little before they had been encouraged to take it.

Nor were any steps taken to restore the confidence of the Assyrian villagers in Sheikhan. They had been looted with the least excuse, as they had taken no part in the Syrian exodus, and prior to that had mainly belonged to the anti-Mar Shimun party. They had seen the results of the labours of the past ten years destroyed within the space of a few hours. They were not unnaturally cowed and dispirited.

Hastily instructions were issued from Baghdad that the Assyrians should be made to return to their villages. These instructions were of course absurd, although, to do the Baghdad authorities justice, it must be said that they as yet did not realize to the full the extent of the damage. Least of all did they realize the state of mind of the Assyrians. Certainly there is a good deal of fatalism in the East, and it is true that massacre and killing has been the hard rule for centuries in those turbulent parts of the world. But for more than a decade there had been law and order in Iraq. The police normally were efficient, and had a good record in dealing with crime and maintaining security. The road were safe, as they had not been for centuries. A new generation was growing up who knew not the old lawlessness of the older generation and who had already begun to appreciate the blessings of settled order. Suddenly the Assyrians began to realize that in spite of the past ten years a situation had arisen in which they could no longer regard themselves as secure. After what they had gone through during the first few days of August, no Assyrian would believe what any Arab official told him. This was scarcely surprising, but it certainly made the question of resettlement infinitely

more difficult. Nor did the local authorities invariably exercise the tact which might have helped to make things easier. In trying to obey Baghdad's instructions, the local authorities at Alqosh, where hundreds of Assyrian men, women, andchildredn had fled for protection from their looted villages and were now living on the charity of the local Chaldean Christians, the Mudir and the Police Inspector ordered the Assyrians to leave. They refused, saying with reason that they had lost everything they possessed, their villages had been destroyed, and that apart form that they were terrified. On this the men were collected in a large courtyard and a machine gun pointed a them as a threat. That is scarcely the way to restore confidence. When I visited Alqosh myself on August 21st I found the Assyrians, like the Assyrians elsewhere, utterly panic-stricken. Not only were they disturbed, but their spirit was completely broken. It was difficult to recognize in their cowed demeanour the proud mountaineers whom everyone had known so well and admired so much for the past dozen years. At Alqosh I did my utmost to persuade the Assyrians to go back to their villages, explaining that the Government had promised to help them to the best of its ability. After a great deal of talk I was to some extent successful, only to find that the Qaimaqam of Sheikhan reported officially that I had done all I could to discourage the Assyrians from returning to their villages. Whether from animosity or indifference or both, it was not until a week later that the Qaimaqam or the Mudir went out themselves to see what was the condition of the villages.

The situation was becoming more and more acute. It was mid-August and within six or eight weeks the cold weather would have begun. From now on I urged almost daily, by telephone or in written reports, that urgent steps should be taken to assess the compensation and to repair the villages. In particular I recommended that one at least of the British Land Settlement officers should be sent up to assess the compensation. It was clear that the local officials, even had they the will, had neither the time nor the ability to carry out this work. Finally, over a month later, a Land Settlement officer was sent up. But his terms of reference were limited. He was not authorized to deal with compensation claims. Nor had the recommendations contained in his excellent and detailed report been carried out when I left Baghdad for England in the beginning of December. Some of the villages certainly were repaired later. In about ten villages in Sheikhan qodha the houses were refoofed, though in the cases where the Assyrians

themselves had done the work they did not receive the payment which had been promised. Small cash advances were made, but these were wholly inadequate. The total amount distributed by way of relief was just over £600, but less than half of this went to Sheikhan Qodha where the need was greatest. As already related, practically none of the loot was recovered and no compensation whatever has been paid.

Under these circumstances it is not surprising that confidence did not return. I remember visiting at the end of August a village named Badriyah, near Alqosh. I found the headman, whose name was Momo Tomo, to be a man of great courage. He and his villagers had had their village entirely destroyed, and had lost practically everything they possessed. He took quite a cheerful view of the situation, whoever, and said he was going to carry on. He was only waiting for the assistance which the Government had promised. He obviously could not rebuild his village, without tools or material, as he had been told to do. The last time I saw him was at the end of October. By then his spirit was broken. He had seen no result from the promises made by the Government. He realized that there was no longer any hope. In my last tour of inspection I found everywhere complete dejection. The villagers were in most placed too cowed to complain - an unusual thing with Assyrians.

When I left Mosul in the middle of November 1932 the position as regards the sixty-four looted villages was as follows: thirty-three were entirely deserted, eight were partially, and twenty-three entirely occupied. Even in the fully occupied villages there was little inclination to sow the winter crop. I did my utmost to induce the villagers to do this. I also tried to persuade the men who had flocked into Mosul to go out again to their villages. I realized that where there were only a few left from any particular village it was impossible for them to return, but I suggested that the men from several different villages should join together and go to one of the large deserted villages, such as Basirian, which had, indeed, been looted, but which could easily be repaired. I met with a blank refusal. The reason generally given was fear. And here it must be mentioned that practically all the Assyrians in Dohuk and Sheikhan had been disarmed. For this there was no justification, as they had committed no offence. Finally, the Government agreed to return a few rifles, but the numbers returned were not nearly sufficient to

restore confidence, for the Assyrians were fully aware that not less than one thousand rifles had just been distributed among their Kurdish neighbours. It is true that a number of temporary police posts were established, but these could do little or nothing to protect the Assyrians in the fields. Most of the villages in Dohuk and some in Sheikhan are even now still empty. In Dohuk the great majority of their original make inhabitants are either dead or are interned in Syria. But some, especially in the case of Sheikhan, have flocked as refugees into Mosul. There are probably upwards of eight hundred able-bodied men in Mosul, of whom perhaps sixty are in employment. The remainder with their families are living on charity, and this charity cannot go on for ever. How they and the people in the villages endured the following winter, when twenty degrees of frost was common, is not pleasant to think of. It is unfortunate that for reasons already explained they have one and all refused to go out to work. It was most important that they should do so. There was obviously not the slightest chance of their being able to leave Iraq for months to come. Apart from their being able to earn their own living, work was essential. Pauperization has already done an infinity of harm to the character of the Assyrians. Allowances, however, must be made for their state of mind, though this is not realized in Iraq. It is easy for Iraqi officials to take the line, "Well, it is unfortunate that all this has happened, but now you must start fresh." it was not so easy for the Assyrians, who had suffered so much, to forget what took place in August.

While the Arabs are totally unable or totally unwilling to understand the Assyrians' attitude of mind, to the Assyrians everything that the Iraqi Government does is suspect. They say that they never know when the next massacre may take place or on what slight pretext it may be begun. They realize that in their present disarmed condition they are no match for the Kurds and Arabs should another wave of resentment sweep over the country. They realize, none better, the way in which religious and national animosities can be fanned to white-heat and irreparable damage done before feeling settles again. They know how easy it is for any Government in Baghdad, by the expenditure of a few pounds, to mobilize furious demonstrations or to lash public opinion into a state of hysteria.

Even in the present state of Arab opinion it is not easy to obtain general support for any scheme to assist the Assyrians at the expense of Arab pockets. In these not -

quite-civilized countries public conscience is neither very acute nor highly developed.

But the Assyrians certainly are not easy to help. In October, having heard reports of overcrowding and destitution among the Assyrian refugees in Mosul, Major Thomson and I visited the Assyrian quarter. We found no serious overcrowding, and, judging by the well-nourished appearance of the children, little destitution. It was, however, obvious that a difficult time would come during the winter. I therefore sent for the only priest left and one or two others of the leading men. I asked them to obtain particulars for me, according to a form which I had prepared, of the men, the number of their dependents, and their last employment. I realized that it would almost certainly be necessary later on to ask for assistance, and that such a request would have to be backed by facts. Two days later the priest came to see me. He told me that he had been nearly stoned in his attempts to obtain the information. The Assyrians refused to give it, and said that they would only do so to an officer of the R.A.F. or Levies. I pointed out that this was a matter which concerned the Iraqi Government. The priest then tried again, but again failed.

The only bright spot was the refugee camp in Mosul. This has been run with a maximum of efficiency and a minimum of fuss by Major Thomson. He had to be firm at first with the Iraqi authorities, and had to point out that he could brook no interference from the local officials. He had also to be firm with the inmates of the camp. With memories of Baquba, they at first refused to draw their own rations. It was quietly but firmly pointed out to them that in this case they would have to leave the camp. The average population of the camp has been about 1,550, all women and children with the exception of a few old men. Of these some six hundred have relatives among the men interned in Syria. The remainder have no male relations left. The camp has cost the Iraqi Government approximately £200 a week. The food is ample, and blankets have been provided and new clothes. Most of them live in tents, but those who have so lived in cold weather know that tents are by no means so cold as is generally supposed. The health of the camp has been excellent, though there were seventy deaths up to November 30, 1933, mostly among young children. An outbreak of diphtheria was quickly checked. Much of this is due to the efforts of Flight-Lieutenant Dixon, a doctor of R.A.F., whose services were kindly lent by the Air officer Commanding, Air vice-

Marshal C. S. Burnett. His work was greatly appreciated by the Assyrians. Unfortunately, the Government doctor, an Assyrian, who took his place, was not of the same standard. Apart from anything else, he was suspect to the women of the camp, as he belonged to the anti-Mar Shimun party, while the women certainly did not.

Besides the women and children in the camp the R. A. F. transported to Hinaidi by air upwards of eight hundred others, relatives of the serving levy soldiers. Most of these would otherwise have had to be maintained in the camp. It was only after much difficulty that the R.A.F. were able to carry out this humanitarian work. Many obstacles were at first placed in the way by the Iraqi Government. Finally, however, the work was completed in a satisfactory manner.

CHAPTER XIII: THE REACTION IN THE TOWNS

It is strange to realize that King Feisal died in ignorance of the atrocious behaviour of the Iraqi Army. His state visit to London had been, unknown to the public, clouded by a succession of disquietening telegrams which, as has been described in a previous chapter, the Ministers in Baghdad had been sending to London. The King finally found it necessary to hurry back from Switzerland, whither he had gone from England for a cure, and when he arrived at the beginning of August he found that the situation had passed completely beyond his control.

Everybody in Iraq had had a fifteen years' experience of British support of the Assyrians. The whole country to a man therefore believed that when Britain learned of the massacres she would stand by her protégés - no other course seemed conceivable. The immediate result was that the British became as unpopular as the Assyrians; not even during the rebellion of 1920 had there been such a fierce wave of ant-British feeling in the country. The King, with his feting in London, was more than ever suspect as a tool of the British. The second-rate Ministers on the spot found themselves leading, and at the same time following, the crowd psychology of anti-British hate which they could not control, even had they wished to. The King, on his return, thus found that he could not ride the storm, and the idea took shape in London that reports from Baghdad about his ill health were but a cloak to cover his impending abdication. Stories were current of interviews between the Palace authorities and the British Chargé D'Affaires, and it was said that the King, who wished to return to Switzerland, was with difficulty and, indeed, only on receipt of a telegram from exalted quarters in London induced to await the return of Sir Francis Humphrys, who had been recalled from leave. The excitement was not confined to the Palace or the Chancelleries. The Arabic Press was venomous in the extreme. Christians in the country were going in fear and trembling. Personal friends of British officials and residents found it politic not to display their friendship too openly. When the first Assyrian attacks at Faish Khabur had failed, the excitement in the country was followed by a period of exaltation which pervaded all ranks and classes. This exaltation was perhaps natural as the Assyrian 'peril', as it was termed, had been vastly overestimated, and, as is customary in the East, the first

reports had greatly exaggerated the intensity of the fighting. Even today the real facts are not fully known in Baghdad. It is true that the Cabinet had had early news of the Army's excesses, although they had not had full details, but what facts they had were studiously kept away from the King. It is even true to say that the first reports of what the Army had done were received with genuine disbelief, and it was honestly thought that no Arab troops could possibly be guilty of such conduct. (To Englishmen who knew the Arabs the news of the Simmel massacre came as a great shock. It is true that during the Mesopotamian campaign starving Arabs were guilty of many excesses against the wounded and stragglers, whether British or Turk. It is also true that the moment of victory bloodlust has often led Arabs to unnecessary killing. But massacres in cold blood are not consonant with the Arab character. Unfortunately, most of the senior officers of the Iraqi Army were Turkish trained, and to this and to the fact that the recent events had really frightened them must be ascribed the behaviour of the Army at Simmel).

A suggested inquiry was tentatively agreed to by the King, but when the Minister of Interior went to Mosul, as described in the last chapter, and thus was the first Iraqi to realize the truth, he saw at once the dangers of any inquiry, and therefore insisted that no inquiry should be held. He forced his point by the threat of resignation, and in his telephoned reports from Mosul to Baghdad he took the popular line of ascribing the whole affair to the actions of the Assyrians, and also the reports that were leaking through of the machinations and the intrigues of the British. (It is the case that much of the first information was sent out of the country by foreign residents, many of them British, who were so disgusted at the massacres, that they felt that at all costs the news must be made known in Europe.)

Hikmet Beg, who, as already stated, was more Turk than Arab, both in appearance and character, had never been considered as one of the Iraqi nationalist leaders, but he suddenly found himself raised to the pinnacle of a national hero. When he returned to Baghdad his protestations were accepted at their face value, and he was given a triumphal reception as the man who had broken the influence of the British in the north. Sir Francis Humphrys arrived on August 23rd, and almost immediately the tension was eased and Hikmet fell from his pinnacle. Sir Francis made it clear that the

British policy was not to support the Assyrians, but to support the Arabs in the maintenance of the integrity of the Iraqi State. Later the publication of the Blue Book, which was translated into Arabic and reprinted in the Baghdad newspapers, proved conclusively that the British advisers to the Iraqi Government had done their utmost to assist the Government in its dealings with the Assyrians. Thus Hikmet's stock fell heavily.

The situation in Baghdad and Mosul in the last week of August was indeed interesting. The British Ambassador's assurances had not yet had time to overcome the tense emotional excitement which had held the Arabs in its grip since the beginning of the month. When the battalions of the Iraqi Army returned to the capital they were given a tumultuous reception, although the demonstrations were largely artificial. (It has always been easy in Iraq, by the spending of a few pounds, to organize great demonstrations of the riff-raff; in such demonstrations men of any substance are invariably conspicuous by their absence, but to any uninformed stranger they look genuine ebullitions of popular feeling). But the Baghdad demonstrations were nothing like those in Mosul, where the enthusiasm was certainly spontaneous and did not have to be organized by the Cabinet. At this time the Ministers had two objects - it was important to impress on foreigners the unity of the nation and the undesirability of intervention; they also desired to impress on the King that he was dealing with a Cabinet backed by the nation and that if he opposed them it was he who would suffer, for as related in an earlier chapter the Cabinet had been greatly irritated by the attempts which the King had made to intervene over the Mar Shimun's return to Mosul. The Ministers now felt that the King might display what they thought was further weakness. The Prime Minister was Rashid Ali Beg, a member of the famous Gailani family, an honest but hot-headed man. He had never been among the strongest supporters of King Feisal, (and yet he had come to the Premiership from the post of Court Chamberlain and had thus, for some considerable time, been in the King's immediate entourage and receiving his close confidence) whose policy he had often frankly criticized. The Cabinet at the beginning of August was by the way of being a Coalition. The two Ministers who were the devoted friends and supporters of the King - Nuri Pasha Said and Rustum Beg Haidar - had accompanied him to London and were

absent during the critical months. Within the Cabinet Hikmet Beg had in the past, no less than Rashid Ali, been outspoken in his criticism of the King. His anger and suspicion had been aroused by the King's attempt to rule the country as a kind of constitutional dictator - the only way, be it said, in which Iraq can possibly be run for years to come, as the country's parliamentary system is a farce. Yasin Pasha, usually considered to be the strong man of Iraq, had maintained a Sphinx-like attitude and the rest of the Cabinet were of little experience and less weight.

Throughout August the King was the subject of scarcely veiled attacks. He was held to be under the sway of the British. The fact that he was the greatest patriot in Iraq, and that it was he alone who could have brought about the independence of the country in so short a time, was ignored or forgotten. This is not the place to make long mention of the character or the services of King Feisal. He had his failings, and who has not? But if the Kingdom of Iraq is to survive, it will almost be entirely owing to the untiring efforts of its first King.

The King on his return to Baghdad on August 2nd, was a very sick and a very tired man. His English friends indeed had commented on his appearance during his state visit to London. The shock of the Assyrian affair, the realization that during the demonstrations in Baghdad hardly a cheer was raised for him, while even the name of Mustapha Kemal was received with enthusiasm, his anger over what seemed to him a domestic disgrace at Angora, no doubt hastened his death. He left Baghdad, almost unnoticed, on the morning of September 2nd. He died at Geneva five days later. He had worn himself out in the service of his country. The news of his death shocked Iraq from end to end, and the inevitable reaction in his favour took place, but unfortunately Arab memories are short. (King Feisal himself in his later years hardly ever mentioned Colonel Lawrence, to whom he owed so much).

In Kirkuk, too, there had been much excitement. Here the memories of the Levy outbreak in 1924 still rankled, and here a considerable number of Assyrians were employed by the Iraq Petroleum Company. Fortunately, the local authorities, unhampered by the military, took a firm line and no trouble occurred. Another Iraq Petroleum Company centre, Baiji, a village on the Tigris some one hundred miles south of Mosul, was the scene of some rioting. The Assyrian labourers were attacked by the

Arabs and there were a few casualties. The prompt arrival of police reinforcements soon restored order.

It was in Mosul where the most serious reactions took place. This was natural. Mosul had had much to do with the Assyrians . For some years it had been the headquarters of the Assyrian Levies. Many Assyrians lived in the town and the Mar Shimun himself had had his residence here ever since he had completed his education in England. The Assyrians were disliked and feared. Mosul is a large town of one hundred thousand people, of whom over ten thousand are Christians. The Chaldean Patriarch lived here also, and there are also Bishops of the Chaldean, Jacobite, and other Christian sects, as well as an Apostolic Delegate, a Frenchman. Few people who have visited Mosul have spoken well of its mongrel inhabitants. Sir Mar Sykes, in his "Caliphs Last Heritage", describes them in no uncertain terms.

The news of the exodus to Syria stirred the town greatly. For some months past, indeed, there had been a certain ebullience of feeling, caused by incidents such as the stone-throwing episode which has been described in an earlier chapter (See Chapter VIII). The news of the fighting at Dairabun inflamed the passions of the mob. Not only the Assyrians, but the French and the English were bitterly attacked. The local newspapers led a violent campaign. The French had for long been suspect. It was commonly believed that they desired nothing better than trouble in Iraq in order to show grounds for the maintenance of their mandate in Syria. The manner in which they had interpreted their mandate and in which they were carrying it out was very different from that of the British, and had been strongly criticized by the Iraqis. The news of the return of the arms to the Assyrians intensified the feeling. Though the return of the arms, or rather the way in which this was done, was undoubtedly a serious error of judgement on the part of the French frontier officials, it is hardly believable that it was, as was believed even in Iraqi official circles, part of a deep-laid French scheme. The French Consul in Mosul, M. Lucas, was accused of having been in close touch with Yacu before he left for Syria. Such a charge was entirely unfounded. The British, too, were viciously attacked in the Press and elsewhere. (And here it is to be noted that no steps were taken against any of the Baghdad newspapers which had been bitterly insulting Iraq's ally, Great Britain, whereas the English newspaper, The Baghdad Times, had a few

months earlier been suspended for having reprinted certain references to the table manners of the Shah of Persia, which had already appeared in a London newspaper). The episode of the Inspecting Officer of Police has already been related. When I asked the Director-General of Police how he could possibly accuse Major Sargon of deliberately working against the Government which he was serving, he replied that he had definite information that the R.A.F. Intelligence Officer and the British Levy officers were nightly visiting the house of the Mar Shimun. This, of course, was absurd. The R.A.F., too were accused of dropping messages, food, and ammunition on the Assyrians. One Iraqi official was blamed for not having forwarded such a report, and when he gave as a reason that he did not believe it, he was further censured. An Iraqi aeroplane crashed in taking off, owing to being overweighed with bombs. It was at once reported that a wheel had been deliberately loosened by the R.A.F. mechanics in order to cause an accident. Under like circumstances similar distorted reports are always believed by the riff-raff of a nation but in Mosul the belief was shared by most of the intelligentsia of the town as well as by the officials. (Needless to say, it was reported that Colonel R. E. Lawrence was present, stirring up trouble - this time against the Arabs!). The Christians in the town were thoroughly alarmed by the violence of feeling though as yet no definite threats had been made against them. It was, however, impossible for any Assyrian to move out of his quarter. A young Assyrian boy who had done so was assaulted and seriously injured under the eyes of the police, because he was thought to be about to place a bomb on the Mosul bridge! It had been reported earlier that an Assyrian had been poisoning the town water supply. The people of Mosul ignored the obvious fact that this would affect Assyrians as much as anyone else. The actual truth was that an Assyrian employed by the R. A. F. had been seen putting some clearing chemicals into the water, as had been done for the last ten years. (A squadron of the R.A.F. was still stationed at Mosul. The guards for the camp and aerodrome were Assyrian Levies. The possibility of these Levies giving trouble in case of hostilities between the Iraqi forces and Yacu had been the source of considerable anxiety to all of us in Mosul. In the event the Assyrian levies gave proofs of the highest type discipline, and this despite their natural anxiety for their families who were living in the Assyrian quarter in Mosul. A really extraordinary situation arose when the Assyrian

Levies acted as guards to the Iraqi aeroplanes, which were loading bombs to be dropped on their kinsmen at Faish Khabur).

The news of the failure of the Assyrian attack to some extent relieved the strain, though, as it was at first thought that large armed bodies of Assyrians were moving about in the mountains, some anxiety remained. On August 12th David Effendi and Theodore, the father and brother of the Mar Shimun, were deported from Mosul. A considerable amount of propaganda harmful to both the Government and the Assyrians had been emanating from the house of the Mar Shimun ever since the exodus into Syria had taken place. It was necessary that this should be stopped. A number of leaders of the Mar Shimun's party had been deported from Mosul a few days earlier. It was also desired to deport Surma Khanum herself, the aunt of the Mar Shimun. She had, without the least doubt, been at the back of the anti-Government propaganda. Her deportation, however, had to be postponed. When the police went to her house, he found it full of Assyrian women in the last state of hysteria. They were capable of anything. The Iraqi officials in Mosul were unwilling to use force, as they did not wish to have the blood of women on their hands, so Surma was left alone for the time being, though she left Mosul peacefully a few days later. (When she left Mosul with a party of relatives she proceeded by road to Baghdad. The party stayed some time in the Y.M.C.A., whence they ultimately left for Cyprus, where they still are).

When the news of the massacres in the north reached Mosul the reaction was very great, and a second and far more serious crisis ensued. In Mosul, unlike Baghdad, few of the inhabitants displayed the least regret for what had occurred. On August 18th the troops which had taken part in the Dairabun fighting returned to Mosul. They were given an enthusiastic reception. Triumphal arches had been erected. Some of the arches had been decorated with melons stained with blood and with daggers stuck into them. This delicate representation of the heads of slain Assyrians was in keeping with the prevailing sentiment in the town. There was no actual disorder, for the simple reason that the Christian population were careful to remain within their houses, but the Moslems were full of exaltation. There was much firing of revolvers and rifles in the air to mark their joy at the deliverance from the menace of the Assyrians. There were loud cheers for the Army and Bekir Sidqi. On all hands one heard cries of "Long Live Iraq!"

"Long Live Mustapha Kemel!" (the ruler of Turkey; it must be remembered that as a town Mosul is still very largely under Turkish influence, and is very largely Turkish in sympathy) "Long Live Hajji Ramadhan!"(the commander of the column). There was no cheering for King Feisal, although there was cheering for his son, the Crown Prince Ghazi (the present King).

The newspaper articles became more and more violent, and had more and more excited public feeling. On August 18th I wrote to the Acting Adviser of the Ministry of Interior a strong warning. I pointed out that a situation might shortly arise fraught with peril to the large Christian population of Mosul. The Iraqi Army was in a most violent mood, and in view of what had actually happened at Simmel it was obviously capable of anything. Apart from this, a violent campaign of anti-foreign and anti-Christian propaganda had lashed the mob into a state of frenzy. The Christians in Mosul were panic stricken, and with an excited and entirely undisciplined mob any small incident might lead to a tragedy. I considered that the crisis would come if any foreign powers or the League of Nations made any protests or demands. It was almost certain that the Army would object to any foreign intervention, and that its attitude would effectively prevent any attempts on the part of the civil authorities or police to maintain order.

The reason for this fresh outbreak was the fear of foreign intervention. Hikmet Beg, the Minister of Interior, had been the first to realize the danger. He, without doubt, regretted the massacres which had occurred, and in fact he had been largely instrumental in preventing further excesses. But he saw that such events would inevitably lead to protests and even to intervention from outside Iraq.

Every Moslem and Christian in Iraq and particularly in the north was convinced that intervention by Europe was certain, unless Iraq could forcibly prevent it. In the course of the deliberations of the Permanent Mandates Commission at Geneva, as related in an earlier chapter, (See Chapter VI) Sir Francis Humphrys, in answer to a question put by a member of the Commission, had stated that the "moral responsibility" would rest with His Majesty's Government if Iraq should prove herself unworthy of the confidence placed in her (the context being the treatment of minorities in Iraq following the termination of the Mandate). Whatever may be said in England: (Viscount Hailsham, the Minister for War, making a Government statement on the subject in

answer to an interpolation of the Archbishop of Canterbury, interpreted the High Commissioner's declaration in the following words:

> *"What Sir Francis Humphrys was saying was this: that the Mandates Commission having asked: "Are you satisfied that Iraq is so far developed that it can be safely entrusted with this liberty?"*
>
> *Sir Francis Humphrys replied: "I am satisfied that it can, but the responsibility for taking that view must rest on us, His Majesty's Government, rather than on you, the Mandates Commission, who obviously cannot know the facts so well." He was not saying and never was saying and never was understood to say, that he was guaranteeing, in the future, that His Majesty's Government would protect minorities in Iraq, and would assume a moral responsibility with regard to them. That he did not mean that, and was not understood to mean that is shown clearly by what happened afterwards." (Official Report of House of Lords Debate, November 28, 1933), or in Geneva as to the meaning of the words "moral responsibility", everyone in Iraq how the Assyrians had considered themselves to be the friends of the British, and everyone knew the services which they had rendered to the British*.

Uninformed opinion could not believe that the British would desert their friends in time of trouble, and wide credence was obtained for the reports that British troops had been manded at Kuwait or even at FAO. (The troops were even identified. It was said that a Gurkha division had arrived from Karachi and there were widespread reports that British troops in India were under orders to stand by. FAO is in Iraqi territory at the mouth of the Shat-al-Arab; Kuwait is an independent principality at the head of the Persian Gulf, about ninety miles due south of Basra; there is no harbour for big ships and no water supply inside the town, but these facts did not prevent the rumours from spreading). So argued Hikmet Beg and nearly all the people in Mosul. The only way to prevent such intervention, which would menace the newly gained independence of the country, was the threat of further massacre. Hikmet Beg himself said to me: "If there is any outside interference or any attempt to obtain revenge, far worse will happen than has already occurred." Nor was this an idle threat. Messages were sent out to the Arab and

Kurdish tribes to be ready to resist the foreigners to the last drop of their blood. The replies received were favourable, if hardly genuine. But the feelings of the Moslem mob in Mosul were genuine enough. Their latent fanaticism was easily stirred. Not that the matter was one of religion - the Assyrian question was essentially political, and the threats to massacre the Christians were made not so much because of their religion, as because they were felt to be the weak link in the unity of the State. The Christians were naturally panic-stricken. For some days the tension was such that the slightest incident might have caused a general massacre. On several occasions I pointed out the danger to Hikmet Beg, and asked him to check the Press and the violent talk. He said he would, but he did little or nothing. He did not wish to give up his strongest weapon. He did not want, it is true, any out-break to occur until the right moment, but he forgot that the passions of a fanatical mob are far easier to arouse than to control. A speech made by Bekir Sidqi to the people of Mosul by way of thanking them for the reception of the Army still further increased the nervousness of the Christians.

> *O, Liberal sons of the Habda (Mosul)!*
>
> *Your display of the noble Arab character and your enthusiasm in honouring the Iraqi Army, which has disciplined the rebel Assyrians, and your great welcome to it in appreciation of the small duty which it has performed, has brought back to mind those immortal episodes, the true patriotism and the noble deeds, in which the people of Mosul were prominent under the most trying and difficult of times, when the sword of occupation was upon our necks. Thanks to you, O sons of the Habda, thanks added to admiration and esteem, thanks which I offer as a pledge of what the Army is about to perform in the future, in accomplishment of the great duty, which the Army has felt and is still feeling that it must be prepared to perform. Therefore let us, with Army and Nation, await that day.*

It was now becoming known that foreign intervention was unlikely, but it took some little time for this news to penetrate into Mosul. As has been noted, Sir Francis Humphrys returned on August 23rd, but on August 27th when the Crown Prince, the Amir Ghazi, came to Mosul for a visit and to inspect the troops, there was little difference in

the emotional temperature. On this visit the Crown Prince was accompanied by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Interior. A reception was held on his arrival in the Municipal Gardens - previously known as the "Amery Garden" in honour of the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, to whose efforts in 1925 had been due the inclusion of Mosul in Iraq instead of in Turkey. The foreign Consuls were invited to this reception as well as the religious dignitaries, both Moslem and Christian. As the Crown Prince entered the usual cheers were raised, and these were followed by cries of "Down with Britain", "Down with the Colonizers". This, of course, was a direct insult to the British Consul, who was present in his official capacity. The incident was duly reported to the British Embassy, but it does not appear to have been officially brought to the notice of the Iraqi Government. I personally was present at this reception, and I will always remember the icy feeling with which I was greeted. I have been through several periods of acute anti-British agitation in both Egypt and Iraq, but I have never experienced anything to approach the atmosphere which existed in Mosul during those August days of 1933.

The next day the Amir Ghazi held a review of the Army to which all the tribal chieftains from northern Iraq had been invited. Contrary to custom, the British colony in Mosul were not invited individually to this function, with the result that the only foreigners present were the Consuls (British, French and Persian), the British Insprector-General of the Iraqi Army, and a British newspaper correspondent. The troops were greeted with tremendous enthusiasm, though it must be admitted that the machinegun detachment, which actually carried out the massacres at Simmel, were not singled out for any special mark of approval. Bekir Sidqi and the principal commanders were the great heroes as the troops marched past. The Ghazi himself was the subject of great acclamations by the crowd, but the name of his father, the King, was not once heard during the cheering, which went on almost continuously, except during the silence which attended the decoration of the "victorious" colours by the Crown Prince. Notable amongst the tribal leaders who were received with acclamation was the tall figure of Sheikh Ajil of the Shammar, whose tribesmen, it will be recalled, had been brought in to continue the looting of the massacred Assyrian villages.

During the next few days there were official dinners and receptions, to which the

leading Christians were invited. Whatever their feelings, they had no option but attend. Some of them were "persuaded" to write telegrams to the League of Nations and other bodies expressing their entire satisfaction with the steps taken to crush the Assyrians' "rebellion". No doubt the bodies which received these telegrams took them at their proper value. They were, of course, not worth the paper on which they were written. This could not be otherwise when the local Christians saw the attempts which had been made during the last few days to create the atmosphere of a Jehad.

From now on, however, there was some improvement. Christians, even Bishops, who had at first been unable to leave their homes without insults, could now do so. But it was quite out of the question for Assyrians to leave their quarter. By the end of October, however, the situation, on the surface at any rate, was calmer, but it will be a long time before the situation in Mosul returns to what it was prior to August 1933.

It is beyond question that as a result of these tragic events everyone concerned has suffered, British, Iraqis, Assyrians, and the League of Nations. It is not surprising that it is often asked whether these happenings could not have been prevented. It is easy to be wise after the event, but it is difficult to avoid the impression that in giving up the Mandate with the Assyrian question still unsettled a very grave risk was taken. With an extremely difficult, suspicious, and truculent people like the Assyrians on the one hand, and with hot-headed and inexperienced Iraqi officialdom on the other, it appears that a clash was almost inevitable. It is certainly not clear why operations against Sheikh Ahmed el Barzan were undertaken in the summer of 1932, in the course of which British aeroplanes were forced to drop delayed action bombs on Kurdish villages, while the infinitely more serious Assyrian question was left unsettled. It was hardly fair on the Iraqi Government that it should be faced with such a problem in the first days of its independence. For the Assyrian problem was not one of land settlement. It was essentially political.

Not the strongest advocate of British policy in the near and Middle East during the last hundred years would venture to suggest that it has been entirely consistent; but political and commercial interests have as a rule tended to suppress moral impulses which have occasionally been felt. This has been far less realized in England than in the East, where, as in Europe, the British Governments are credited with a greater

machiavellianism than they usually deserve. There is, however, no doubt that as a result of the happenings of last summer British prestige in Iraq and throughout the Middle East as well has suffered a sever blow. The dwellers in Iraq consider, rightly or wrongly, that we have let down our friends. A few Iraqi politicians may pay lip-service to the assistance which we rendered at Geneva, but the rank and file are frankly contemptuous. During the last three months that I was in Mosul no Christian and very few Moslems would willingly visit the British Consul, myself, or any other British official. They feared to be tarred with the brush of being friends of the British. It was difficult to blame them. It could hardly be expected that they would understand the enormous difficulties which the British Government had had to face in its endeavours to settle this complex problem.

The object of this book has been to show how great these difficulties were. It is hoped, moreover, that the account which has been given of the massacres will do something to dispel the rumours which have been current on the Continent and elsewhere that British officers were present at these massacres and did nothing to stop them.

The position of British officials in the civil administrations was one of extraordinary difficulty. They had no executive powers. It has been written, "An adviser without responsibility can only produce irritation, when his advice does not happen to agree with the opinion of the officer who has the responsibility". When the adviser and the responsible official are of different nationality, have different standards, and look at the question from a different angle, the difficulties are multiplied a hundredfold.

Not that the actions of the local Iraqi officials could be greatly criticized, at first, at any rate, but with the atmosphere existing in Mosul during August it would have taken a very brave and a very strong man to have withstood public opinion, which considered any yielding to foreign advice flagrant treachery to the country.

Nevertheless, it is hoped that in justice to the Iraqis it may be realized that the massacres themselves were the work of a small section of the Army. It is true that weakness, some of it of a glaring nature, was shown by politicians at the time and afterwards, but there is no doubt at all that practically all responsible Iraqis feel deep and genuine regret for what took place, even if such regret is perhaps tempered with

satisfaction that the Assyrians bubble has burst.

CHAPTER XIV: THE FUTURE OF THE ASSYRIANS

The events of the late summer of 1933, which have been described in the predceding chapters, have entirely altered the problem of the Assyrian minority in Iraq. This problem had been sufficiently difficult in 1932, when most people still hoped that the Assyrians would be able to settle in Iraq, but now these hopes have proved vain and it is clearly essential that the majority, at least, of the Assyrians, should be enabled to leave the country as soon as possible.

The Assyrians of Iraq can now be divided into three classes. Firstly, there are those, about 550 in number, who after the fighting at Dairabun re-crossed the Tigris into Syria, and who have been interned there ever since. It is highly improbable that any of them would wish to return to Iraq, even though they do not appear to be finding conditions in Syria particularly pleasant. It is even more improbable that the Iraqi Government would be willing to accept them, if they did wish to return. Their families were maintained by the Iraqi Government in the Refugee Camp at Mosul until September 1934, when the French Mandatory Authorities after many hesitations, allowed them to join their men folk in Syria. About 1,400 women and children availed themselves of the opportunity, and they are now living at Hassetche on the Khabur river, about forty miles from the Iraqi frontier. Their settlement here, however, cannot be, and is not intended to be, other than temporary. It should be mentioned that the Iraqi Government has paid the French £10,000 as a consideration for accepting the families. The French Government has, however, pointed out that unless the Assyrians are moved in the near future, even this generous contribution will be insufficient to cover the expenses likely to be incurred in Syria.

Secondly, there are those still in Iraq who suffered directly from the massacres and looting of the summer of 1933. These are, as has already been described, cowed and dispirited. Most of them are people who had committed no offence against the Iraqi Government which proved entirely unable to protect them. It is now easy for supporters of the Mar Shimun to turn round and say: "Well, we always told you that the Iraqi Government intended to massacre you, and now you see that we were right". These people are naturally still terrified, and it will be a long time before they can recover from

their terrible experiences. They are in no way likely to be a danger to the Government, nor, however uncomfortable and unhappy they may be on the other hand, are they themselves in any particular danger, as the Iraqi Government has now taken adequate measures to protect them. As related in an earlier chapter, many of them have not even now returned to their villages and are living on precarious charity in Mosul. A further problem consists of those women and children who lost all their male relatives during the massacre. The Iraqi Government hoped to distribute them among the Assyrian villages, giving a grant of £8 to each woman and £4 to each child, but this plan has not been successful owing to the unwillingness of the refugees to leave the camp. The third class consists of those who did not suffer directly. They can be divided into two groups. The villages of the Assyrians in the Aqra, Zibar, and Rowanduz districts are scattered among the Kurds. They are unlikely to give any trouble, and there is nothing to show that they are much worse off than before - apart, of course, from the altered atmosphere. In the Qodha of Amadiyah, however, the position is rather different. Here, the Assyrians, particularly in the sub-districts of Barwari Bala and Nerwa Raikan, are almost as numerous as the Kurds. They still retain much of their former spirit, and though the truculence which they at times display may now in part be due to fear, that it exists is proved by their conduct in the September following the massacres, when it was alleged that on the day of the funeral of King Feisal in Baghdad, several villages went out of their way to hold ceremonies of rejoicing. Incidentally, some of the Assyrian women in Mosul displayed similar bad manners by spitting when the mourning processions passed their quarter. The Kurds in Amadiyah had been restrained from looting, and their disappointment was great and openly expressed when the heard what glorious looting had taken place father south. There is no doubt that they would eagerly seize any opportunity to take their turn. Such an opportunity will only be given them if the Assyrians themselves do something foolish, but this is not by any means beyond the bounds of possibility. Fortunately, there has been until recently an extremely capable Qaimaqam at Amadiyah. It is doubtful whether anyone but Majid Beg could have prevented serious trouble in Amadiyah during the summer of 1933. He had the confidence of the Assyrians to an extent posssessed by no other Iraqi official, and so long as he remained at his post no trouble was likely to occur. The Iraqi Government

realized this, and retained him at Mosul for twelve months after the massacres, even though this delayed his well-deserved promotion.

The Iraqi Government has also realized that it is in its own interests, as well as those of the Assyrians, that any Assyrian who may wish to do so, should be able to leave the country. It is true that at first certain local officials displayed signs of wishing to persuade Assyrians to stay, apparently thinking that it would be something of a blot on the good name of their administration if anyone wanted to leave, but it now appears that this phase has passed. In any case a committee has been appointed to ascertain the wishes of the Assyrians, and this committee has Major Thomson as its president, so there should be no difficulty in ascertaining the real desires of the Assyrians.

The next question is, "How many will want to go?" the actual number of Assyrians in Iraq is not accurately known (nor are the number of Arabs or Kurds, for that matter), but they probably total anything between 20,000 and 25,000. Most competent and impartial observers consider that it is fairly certain that at least 90 percent will wish to leave, and it is quite possible that only a few hundreds will eventually remain. Some doubts have been expressed as to the intentions of the autochthonous Assyrians, the "ayahs" of Barwari Bala, but the latest information confirms the impression that they will not wish to stay. Throughout the Assyrian villages there was in the autumn of 1933 a move to sell their flocks, a foolish proceeding as very low prices were obtained. In many villages, too, there was a disinclination to sow the winter crop, despite the fact that all Assyrians had been told that there was even then not the slightest chance of their being able to leave until the summer of 1934 at the earliest. These indications, however, were sufficient proof of their intentions.

But though practically all the Assyrians wish to leave, they do not all wish to go to the same place. The anti-Mar Shimun party still exists, and its leaders state definitely that they refuse to go to the same place as the Mar Shimun. Before I left Mosul in November 1933, Khoshaba came to see me. He told me that he realized that the Assyrians would never obtain such favourable agricultural conditions as they possessed in Iraq. He said, however, that in view of what had just happened, it was quite impossible for them to remain there but that he and his followers did not wish to live in the same country as the Mar Shimun if the latter was to be allowed to exercise any kind

of "temporal power". He and his friends have said so again, and have requested that this should be brought to the notice of the League of Nations. The strength of the two parties cannot be accurately stated. Possibly the anti-Mar Shimun party represent 25-33 percent of the whole, but it is difficult to say, as none can tell for certain to what extent the sectional leaders, for example, Malik Khammo of the Baz and Malik Nimrud of the Jilu represent the rank and file. Many Assyrians, even though they are not personally opposed to him, certainly feel that the leadership of the Mar Shimun has been bad, but on the other hand, the events of 1933, and the failure of the Government to compensate the innocent victims brought about a certain reaction in his favour.

Feeling between the two parties has been bitter. At the beginning of November 1933 certain "raises" of the Ashuti, belonging to the anti-Mar Shimun party visited the refugee camp in Mosul. They were immediately set upon and attacked by the Baz and Tukhuma women, who cried, "You are the people who persuaded our men to trust the Government and now thy are all killed". Only the arrival of Major Thomson prevented them from being severely handled. Malik Khammo of the Baz would not dare to go near the camp. At the end of January following, a fight occurred between members of the two parties, which resulted in ten of them being lodged in the lock-up.

It is essential that the differences between the two parties should receive full consideration when the new settlement is made. It is possible that the Mar Shimun will object to this, as he still hopes that the Assyrians may be placed in a homogeneous settlement. But, though some people may regret it, there is now no hope of anything in the nature of an Assyrian nation, and the sooner this is realized the better for all concerned. The Mar Shimun can still retain his spiritual authority over Assyrians, wherever they are, as does the Pope over Roman Catholics all over the world, but more than that he cannot hope for. If the scheme, to which reference will be made a little later in this chapter, for the settlement of Assyrians in British Guiana is finally accepted, the area available is large enough to avoid settling the two parties in uncomfortable proximity.

When the League of Nations Council met in November 1933 the question of the Assyrian massacres appeared on the agenda. The Iraqi delegates put up their case - that represented in the Blue Book prepared by the Iraqi Government. They admitted

that excesses had been committed by regular troops, and stated that these excesses, whatever the provocation, merited and received severe condemnation. Sir John Simon said the same thing. He said that any attempt to apportion the blame was beside the point. What was essential was that the future of the Assyrians should be safeguarded. Both the British and Iraqi Governments were convinced that this could only be done if the Assyrians could be found new homes outside Iraq.

The League of Nations and Great Britain have been severely criticized for their failure to carry out an inquiry into the events of last summer, and for their failure to obtain the punishment of the officers responsible. It is, however, difficult to see how any action could have been taken. Iraq is now an independent State, and would certainly have refused any League Inquiry. In any attempt to force this upon her, there existed, as has been stated in the previous chapter, so great a risk of a massacre of Christians in Mosul town, and the surrounding districts, that no responsible person would have dared to take it, for though rioting and disorders might have been stopped fairly quickly, they would not have been stopped quickly enough - especially in view of the attitude of the Iraqi Army - to prevent the death of, at least, hundreds of people. It may have been ignoble to give in before such a threat, but there was no alternative. It is possible, however, that a stronger diplomatic pressure might have been brought to bear on the Iraqi Government to carry out an inquiry of its own. It could have been pointed out that accounts of the atrocities committed by the Army had been published in every newspaper in the world, and that the good name of Iraq had been blackened. Iraq could best clear its name by holding an inquiry of its own and punishing any persons found guilty. In view of the temper of the people, it would have been impracticable to hold such an inquiry at once, but when the situation became calmer it would have been possible. The argument that the Army would not have brooked such an inquiry is not altogether valid. The Iraqi Army is rent by internal dissensions, and many of its officers, it is satisfactory to be able to say, have expressed their horror of what happened in the north. In any case, if Iraq is to be ruled by the Army the future is indeed dismal.

The Council of the League of Nations agreed to the statements of Great Britain and Iraq, and a special Committee was appointed to inquire into the possibility of the Assyrians being found new homes outside Iraq.

The Tragedy of the Assyrians

Unfortunately, up to the date of writing, more than a year after the Simmel massacre, hopes that the Assyrians could be quickly moved from Iraq have been disappointed. The difficulty has been to find somewhere for them to go to. Early in 1934 there appeared a possibility that the Assyrians might be settled in Southern Brazil, on the estates of a British Company which is developing certain forest tracts on the Parana River. The Brazilian Government tentatively approved of this plan, and in February the League of Nations sent out a committee to investigate on the spot. This committee consisted of Brigadier Browne, who for some years had been in command of the Assyrian Levies, Major Johnson of the Nansen Relief Office, Geneva, and the Counsellor to the Swiss legation in Brazil. The report was favourable, and , despite climatic and other differences, there appeared to be no reason why the Assyrians should not flourish in Brazil. Unfortunately, it gradually became clear that public opinion in Brazil was opposed to any considerable Assyrian immigration. Malicious reports had been spread regarding the quarrelsomeness and pugnacity of the Assyrians, and it was feared that they might be employed as mercenaries on one side or another in the civil wars which not infrequently break out in Brazil. Such fears were quite unfounded. The Assyrians certainly have a warlike history, but they have fought for only what they held to be their right and to protect themselves. They were not in the least likely to become involved in the quarrels of other people. Fears were also expressed, perhaps with more reason, that the Assyrians would not settle down as agriculturists, but would tend to flock into the already overcrowded towns. There were, besides, objections to the entry of any more Orientals into Brazil. It is quite true that the Assyrians are Orientals, though they are not black, as some Brazilians appear to have thought, but of all Orientals they would probably assimilate the most easily with the people of whatever country they go to. There are already many Syrians in Brazil, and for the most part they have proved excellent. The Government may reconsider its decision, but in the meantime it has had to yield to popular clamour, and an immigration law has been recently passed which appears to close the door to the entry into Brazil for some time to come.

The failure of the Brazil project was a great disappointment, and for some little time matters remained at a deadlock. The Committee for the settlement of the Assyrians which had been set up by the Council of the League of Nations in October

1933 dispatched urgent appeals to the Governments of a large number of countries, asking if there existed any possibility of settling Assyrians in their home or overseas territories. Among the countries consulted were Great Britain and the Dominions, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, and Argentina. In the meantime, private inquiries had been made, especially in England, as to what possibilities existed. Many people in England considered that it would be of advantage to the British Empire if the Assyrians could be settled within it. Their value as fighting troops would not be lost, and economically they would be a considerable asset. But none of the self-governing Dominions are prepared to accept Asiatic immigrants. There is not enough room in Cyprus. The Assyrians themselves are averse to going to Africa, where the higher lands of Tanganyika would appear to be particularly suitable, though both here and in Kenya there are already sufficient mixtures of races to perplex the local administration. Outside the British Empire, Syria has been suggested, but here the French mandate cannot endure for ever, and the Assyrians would eventually find themselves once again under the rule of a Moslem majority; apart from which, practically all the available lands are now occupied by Armenian refugees from Turkey. Of the other countries, the Argentine would appear to be the ideal, especially in regard to climate, but there is not the slightest reason to think that the Government of that country would consider the entry of large numbers of Assyrians, especially in view of the economic blizzard now raging.

The communications of the Assyrian League Committee has so far only produced two replies which can in any way be termed favourable. One was from the French Government, which on September 24th wrote that the settlement of some Assyrian families in the bend of the Niger (a little distance south of Timbuctoo) might be contemplated. It was pointed out that much investigation was required before it could be ascertained whether such a settlement was likely to be a success. The climate alone renders this most uncertain.

The other reply was received from the British Foreign Office, officials of which have been most assiduous in their efforts to find a solution for the Assyrian problem. In this reply, dated September 22, 1934, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, after pointing out the very great difficulties of finding any suitable home for the Assyrians,

stated that in the British Colonial Empire the only possible place appeared to be the Rupununi district of British Guiana. He wrote as follows:

> *The area is an extensive one, and should be sufficiently large to accommodate all the Assyrians who may desire to leave Iraq. At present it is for the most part unsettled. A considerable number of horses and cattle are grazed upon it, and it appears to have possibilities of further development as a stock-raising area. Its agricultural potentialities have not yet been properly tested, but it is thought that limited areas would lend themselves to cultivation sufficiently to meet the requirements of the Assyrian settlers and their stock. Much closer examination will, however, be necessary, with particular regard to considerations of health and climate and to pastoral and agricultural conditions, before the district can definitely be pronounced as suitable for Assyrian settlement, and an independent and impartial investigation conducted on the spot with this object, under the auspices of the League of Nations, appears to His Majesty's Government to be essential for the satisfaction both of the Council of the League and of the Assyrians themselves, before any decision is reached. The Government of British Guiana estimate that a mission of investigation would require to spend three months in the colony for the proper accomplishment of its task.*

The land concerned is the property of the Government of British Guiana, but certain parts of it are at present leased to private interests. The largest of these interests is the Rupununi Development Company, which holds approximately 1,500 square miles of what is probably the best grazing lands. The Government of British Guiana have accordingly taken the necessary steps to secure an option under which, if the League of Nations decide to proceed with the scheme, the entire assets of the above company could be purchased for the sum of £35,000 at any time prior to March 20, 1935. The assets include not only land leases, but a quantity of cattle, horses, and buildings, which should be a useful nucleus for any settlement operation.

There are in existence in the area certain well-defined Indian reservations which must be preserved and excluded from the land available for settlement. But these

amount to only 855 square miles out of a total of 13,000 square miles, and they are so situated as not to present, as far as can be foreseen, any likelihood of disturbance of Indians by the settlement of Assyrians in adjoining areas and vice versa.

The climate of Rupununi district is tropical, lying as it does only 5° north of the equator, but it is reputed to be healthy, though, of course, very different from that to which the Assyrians have been accustomed. There are two hilly portions rising to 2,000 - 3,000 feet above sea level. The remainder of the area is open savannahs, consisting mainly of undulating park lands of mean height of 300 feet. The lower areas flood to a depth of 1-4 feet during the rainy season. The temperature ranges from 91.9°F. to 71.5°F., the nights being uniformly cool. The rainfall ranges from 55 to 80 inches, two distinct rainy seasons occurring. Perhaps the principal difficulty met with would be that of communications, as at present there are few roads, and the rivers are unnavigable owing to frequent rapids.

The Council of the League accepted the suggestion of the British Government that a committee should be sent to Guiana to investigate on the spot. Brigadier Browne was again appointed a member, and he is accompanied by an Italian agricultural expert. The Nasen Relief Office is not this time represented. The committee left England early in October, and its report should be received early in the new Year. If this report is satisfactory, the main difficulty, that of finding a place for the Assyrians to go to, will have been solved. But another difficulty remains, that of finance. At the time that the Brazilian scheme was being considered, it was estimated, perhaps rather highly, that the transport and settlement of each individual man, woman, and child who left Iraq would cost about £32. (The high cost of transport to such a distant place as Brazil was one of the first objections to that scheme.) As noted earlier in this chapter, it is still uncertain how many Assyrians will eventually decide to go. It is just possible that at the last moment a number will shrink from the long journey and the necessarily uncertain future in an unknown land. The quiet of the past year in Iraq, too, may have to some extent allayed their fears. In any case it is absolutely certain that at least half of the Assyrians in Iraq will wish to leave.

With regard to the remainder, one view is that either most of them will stay, or that practically all of them will go. The Mar Shimun, who has spent the last year, in the

course of which he had a nervous breakdown, moving between Geneva and London - the other members of his family are still in Cyprus - will undoubtedly use all his influence to induce all Assyrians to leave Iraq, if their new home appears to be in any way suitable. It thus can be stated positively that the numbers who will leave cannot be less than 10,000, and very possibly will be double that number. On the basis of £32 a head, the total cost of settlement of 20,000 Assyrians in Brazil would have been at least £600,000. Though the cost of transport to British Guiana would not be less than to Brazil, say £120,000 for 10,000 persons, the cost of settlement may perhaps be expected to be somewhat less.

Nevertheless, the initial costs of transport and settlement for 10,000 persons cannot well be much less than £250,000, and if double that number leave Iraq, as is by no means improbable, £500,000 would be a conservative estimate of the amount of money which will have to be provided. And who is to foot the bill? The Iraqi Government has officially stated that it will assist to the limit of its financial resources, but no one has suggested that it should contribute more than £100,000, especially as the maintenance of the refugee camp and other relief works has cost Iraq upwards of £20,000 during the past year. And here it must be remembered that both in the Iraq Press and Parliament there have been protests against paying anything at all. The old arguments have been brought forward that Iraq was in no way responsible for the misfortunes of the Assyrians, and that the Iraqis had never invited them to come to their country. These arguments must have carried considerable weight had it not been for the unfortunate events of the last summer, even if it must be admitted that Iraqis are apt to forget that but for the lavish expenditure on the part of Great Britain, there would be no Iraq at all today.

The Assyrians, too, should be able to make a substantial contribution. Prior to the summer of 1933, they were, as a community, quite well off, since they are an extraordinarily thrifty people and save money in a remarkable manner. Many of them commonly carry on their person sums of £50 and more in gold. I remember once asking the Qaimaqam of Amadiyah whether he considered that the Assyrians possessed as much money as was generally supposed. He turned round to an

Assyrian police corporal who was in the room, and said: "You have a £100 in gold, haven't you?" and the Assyrian replied with a smile, "Oh yes." Several of the prisoners who were brought into Mosul at the end of August after the fighting were found to be carrying £50 to £60 in gold, which, of course, was returned to them when they were released. Another Assyrian used to come in frequently to ask for a police escort to go out with him to help him to dig up 60 pounds in gold which he had buried in the mountains. Many Assyrians, too, had money out on loan with their Kurdish neighbours. Unfortunately, as already stated, the Assyrian losses during the disturbances, assessed in cash, probably amounted to £50,000, and possibly were much more. Nevertheless, those sections of the community which did not suffer directly, still possess a good deal of money, and it should be possible for them to put up at once £25,000 or even more towards the cost of transport. Even then, however, a considerable sum, possibly as much as £400,000 will have to be found. At Geneva, Sir John Simon has stated that the British Government is prepared to assist financially, if the other nations belonging to the League do the same.

The League Council has not yet considered this offer, but it is clear that few other countries will, in fact, be ready to contribute anything. Many of them, as is well known, have been in arrears with their ordinary subscriptions to the League. It is almost inevitable that they will point to the Declaration made by the accredited representative of Great Britain to the Permanent Mandates Commission in June 1931. This statement has been quoted in full in an earlier chapter. (See Chapter VI). The British Government may be able to claim that the unfortunate events of the summer of 1933, which have made necessary the removal of the Assyrians from Iraq, were the fault of the Iraqis, or of the Assyrians, or of both, but it may be difficult to persuade other countries that, apart from anything else, "moral responsibility" does not infer "financial responsibility" as well. (The following article from the Journal de Geneve of May 17, 1934, is fairly typical of comment on the Continent):

LES ASSYRIENS ET LA RESPONSABILITE BRITANNIQUE

The Tragedy of the Assyrians

Le Conseil de la S. D. N. doit aujourd'hui prendre des decisions d'une gravité exceptionelle dans une affaire qui traine depuis trop longtemps, celle du sort des Assyriens. Theéoriguement, on doit discuter le transport des réfugiés en pays lointain, le Brésil. En réalité, le problème est tout autre: il s'agit de veiller, jusqu'au moment ou l'émigration pourra avoir lieu, à la sécurité d'une petite nation menacée d'extinction. Et les difficultés recontrées par le projet de transport sont telles, qu'il ne saurait etre envisagé avant un grand nombre de mois.

L'opinion brésilienne se montre peu favourable à l'émigration Assyrienne. Et elle objecte non sans raison que la Grande-Bretagne ayant contracté vis-à-vis des Assyriens des engagements précis en utilisant leurs services dans son armée, c'est à elle et non au Brésil à fournir à ce peuple un asile dans l'un des nombreux territories Britannique. Ceci pose le problème sur son vrai terrain, celui des responsibilities de la Grande-Bretagne.

Celle-ci voudra-elle les prendre? Jusqu'à présent, elle a laisséà l'Irak seul les charges financières de l'affaire. Elle s'est borne à promettre une contribution correspondante à sa position de member de la Ligue. Mais peut-on admettre que ses intrets et ses devoirs soient égaux, en l'occurrence, à ceux de la Pologne ou du Mexique?

Le mandat Britannique en Irak coutait fort cher au Trésor. Londres chercha donc une solution quie lui permit de conserver dans le pays tous les advantages du mandat avec le moins possible de ses charges. Elle émancipa l'Irak, en se réservant la haute main sur ses richesses pétrolifères, et en conservant quelques points stratégiques qui lui laissent dans tout litige eventual le dernier mot. L'Irak n'est-il pas sur la route des Indes?

L'Angleterre maintient des aérodromes en Irak grace auxquels elle y conserve la haute main. Elle fait garder encore à l'heure actuelle ces aerodromes par les levées Assyriennes, qui lui content moins cher que des soldats Anglais et dans lesquelles elle a plus confiance que dans les troupes Irakiennes. La fidélité de ces Assyriens lui est assurée, car la Grande-Bretagne demeure pour eux la seule protection possible.

Mais l'Irak aspire à l'indépendance complète, et on ne saurait l'en blamer. Les Irakiens, la délégation Irakienne en convient, voient la domination Anglaise utiliser les

Assyriens et s'en prennent à ces derniers. En les éliminant, on élimine l'Angleterre, tel est du moins le raisonnement simpliste du peuple et du nationalist. Désirant se concilier les bonnes graces de l'Irak, et conserver ainsi le moins cher possible les avantages du mandat sans se charges, Londres laisse faire les Irakiens et leur abandonne les Assyriens.

Les representants Britanniques répondant à cela que l'Irak est indépendant. Il reste pourtant que le Major Young, représentant Britannique à la S.D.N., déclara en Novembre 1930 devant la commission des mandats, que l'influence des functionaires Britanniques, après l'émancipation de l'Irak, saurait non seulement maintenue, mais accord_.

Il est clair que le responsabilité Britannique se trouve de ce fait engagée. Londres a donc intéret à prouver que la situation des Assyriens en Irak est _normale_. D'ou ces rapports officials Britanniques si tranquillisants et si optimistes. Il est malheureux raiment qu'ils soient en si flagrante contradiction avec les rapports de source privée fournis par des sujets Britanniques ou neutres(*).

Afin de _sauver la face_, Londres et Baghdad s opposent aujourd'hui à l'envoi d'une commission d'enquete ou de secours. Sans doubte parce que toutes deux craignent des revelations fort désagréables. N'est-ce pas djà là une confession éclatante?

(*) Voir Documents officials de la S.D.N., nos. C. 643, M. 262, 1930, VI

Si nos informations sont exactes, la situation des Assyriens en Irak est de plus en plus critique. Les enfants de moins de sept ans n'auraient survécu qu'en petit nombre aux privations de l'hiver dernier. Et si la S.D.N. tarde à agir, il n'y aura plus de réfugés à transporter.

L'opinion justement alarmée demande que la S.D.N. agisse avant qu'il soit trop tard. Elle demande aux representants de la Grande-Bretagne à Genéve de ne pas se laisser guider par des préoccupations de gros sous seulement, ce qui semble avoir été jusqu'ici le cas, mais de considérer que L'honneur de la Grande-Bretagne est en jeu, et qu'il vaut plus que quelques millions de livres. En Décembre 1917, L'Angleterre prit à son service les Assyriens et leur promit en échange L'Independence.

(*) Voir déclaration du Colonel J. J. MacCarthy, chef de la mission militaire Britannique en Perse pendant la guerre (The Assyrian Tragedy, annemasse, 1934, page 14)

Aujourd'hui, pour faire quelques économies, Londres laisserait-elle tomberet exterminer le peuple Assyrien? La parole de L'Angleterre n'a-t-elle de valeur que lorsqu'elle est donnée à la Belgique?

Nous nous refusons à croire que les representants de la Grande-Bretagne auront le coeur de s'opposer à l'envoi en Irak d'une commission internationale, et qu'ils voudrent assumer devant le monde et l'histoire une responsabilité aussi écrassante.

Nous nous refusons également à croire que la S. D. N. se dérobera à un devoir aussi précis, et qu'elle voilera la justice derriére d'inextricables technicalities juridiques. Elle ne saurait ainsi abdiquer le principe de morale qui est sa raison d'etre.

The unfortunate British taxpayer may well ask: _Could not all this have been avoided?_ Perhaps, however, the burden may be lightened by something in the nature of a guaranteed loan. It is absolutely essential that the Assyrians should not be pampered any further. They are only too apt to expect everything for nothing, and this is one of the main causes of the deterioration of their moral fibre. There is no reason why they should not gradually repay most of the money as the Armenians are doing in Syria. They may think this hard, and will certainly complain, but it will be for their eventual good.

When the difficulties of finance and place have been solved, and it is known to what country and by what means the Assyrians can leave Iraq, a member of the Nansen International Office for Refugees will proceed to Iraq to join the committee appointed by the Iraqi Government to ascertain the wishes of the Assyrians. This committee at present consists of Major Thomson, President; Major Wilson, Administration Inspector, Mosul, as a member; and as additional member, the Qaimaqam of the Qodha, in which the committee is working, together with leading Assyrians of the particular district. One of the tasks with which the committee will be

faced will be the liquidation of the property, movable and immovable, of the Assyrians. The Iraqi Government will certainly have to intervene in order to prevent a slump in prices, when, for instance, large numbers of sheep are thrown on the market. The actual transport will be in the hands of the Nansen Relief Office, which has had much experience of this kind of work in other countries.

Even if this British Guiana project is adopted, it is clear that many months must elapse before all those Assyrians who wish to leave can be removed from Iraq. The French Government has made it a condition of accepting the dependents of the men interned in Syria that these should be moved first, when new homes have been found for them. After them, it is probable that those Assyrians who are living in a state of destitution in Iraq will be the next to go. The most important of these are the refugees in Mosul. There are not less than 2,500 Assyrians in Mosul, of whom half have come in from the villages. Not more than a hundred of the whole are in employment, since even those who originally lived in Mosul have lost their jobs. Some, for example, owned taxis, but they have been forced to sell at a heavy loss as they found they could no longer work. Thus practically all of them are living on their savings or, in the case of refugees from the villages, on charity. Such savings and charity cannot last for ever. The Iraqi Government has fully accepted its responsibilities as regards the refugee camp, but has done little for those outside it. Not that these, as already been related, are easy to help. It might have been of advantage if a member of the Nansen Relief Office had come to Mosul with a watching brief. He could have reported on the situation to the Iraqi Government.

It was objected with some reason that the presence of a League Commission immediately after the termination of the British Mandate would delay the process of assimilation of Assyrians into the Iraqi State. Such objections are no long valid, as there is no longer any idea of the bulk of the Assyrians remaining in Iraq, and as the Iraqi Government requested the League to find somewhere for the Assyrians to go to. A further suggestion that the British Red Cross might send a relief party to Mosul was also objected to, apparently on the grounds that this would discourage the activities of the Iraqi Red Crescent. But it there is one thing that is quite certain, it is that the newly formed Iraqi Red Crescent Society has not carried out any relief work among the

Assyrians.

The other Assyrians who are still in the villages and who were not directly affected by the disturbances, can follow later, if they wish to do so. Their present position, though uncomfortable, is not serious. Among others who will go will be the Assyrians, about 800 in number, who are still employed in the Levies. They are almost to a man strong advocates of the Mar Shimun, and will certainly follow his advice. Their places as guards of the R.A.F. aerodromes will, presumably, be filled by Arabs and Kurds, who have already been recruited in considerable numbers for that force. These men, who are well paid, are probably the best off of all the Assyrians.

(*) The "Save the Children" fund of 40 Gordon Square, London, has been able to send out of its limited resources over £300 in money, together with 2,500 garments and 1,900 blankets.

All their well wishers must therefore hope that the British Guiana scheme may be found to be practicable. But if it is to be a success, it is up to the Assyrians to do their utmost to help. They must not expect perfection. They must realize that they will have to take the rough with the smooth, and that it is only by abstinence from the politics of the country and by hard work that they can proper. And here another point arises. It has been noted earlier in this book that considerable numbers of the Assyrians are no long agriculturists, and some of them may find it impossible to return to.

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